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The Representation of Trauma in Contemporary Irish Literature

A Thesis Presented

by

KAYLA McCARTHY-CURTIS

DECEMBER 2015

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The Narrative of Traumatic Memory in Postcolonial Irish Fiction

A Thesis Presented

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KAYLA McCARTHY-CURTIS

Submitted to the College of Graduate Studies

Bridgewater State University
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Introduction

Ireland's history has been marked for centuries by violence, with perpetrators coming from within and beyond its borders. England's colonization of Ireland began in the sixteenth century, but the legacy of colonialism has been more powerful in the twentieth century than in any other time. Although Ireland began the process of decolonization shortly after the century began, the process of reclaiming political autonomy from England would not be complete in the Republic of Ireland until the 1940s, while Northern Ireland remains a part of the United Kingdom. The extremely violent decades leading up to Irish independence shaped not only the political landscape of north and south, but also the literary representation of the island and its people.

Decolonization for Ireland has not been an easy process. Throughout the 1990s several events took place which resulted in major shifts to the way the Irish thought about themselves and the country. The signing of the Good Friday Agreement brought about the end to (overt) partisan violence in the north in the late 90s. The economic boom referred to as the Celtic Tiger contributed to the growing trend towards a more secular, consumer driven culture than had ever been experienced before. Once a nation dependent on emigration to maintain economic balance, Ireland saw a thriving economy that could provide not only for its native citizens, but could support an influx of immigrants as well.

Thomas Bartlett, in his history of Ireland, notes the political crises that Ireland had to negotiate in very quick succession; World War I, the Easter Rising, Partition and the creation of the Irish Free State and Northern Ireland, the Civil War, the enactment of the Constitution, World War II, and finally, the signing of the Republic of Ireland Act which severed the final tie with England. This period of uncertainty and upheaval lasts from 1914 until 1949; thirty-five

years, during which political conflicts are intrinsically bound with the definition of Irish national identity. The nationalist movement in Ireland would hold a powerful influence over the country for many decades because, as Declan Kiberd writes, “the value of nationalism was strategic... it helped to break up the self-hatred within an occupied people (“From Nationalism to Liberation” 18)”. For centuries the Irish had been defined as the uncivilized Other in their position as a subject colony of England, constructing an Irish identity that rebuilt a sense of national pride would be a difficult, but necessary task¹. As the country struggled for sure footing as an independent nation, any event, any element that could jeopardize the idealized image of the nation was repressed. The deliberate repression of events that do not fit within the dominant community identity is a frequent technique to maintain power and control over the Other. In Ireland it is a tool utilized to enforce conformity to the nationalist agenda.

For a nation long defined by a romanticized, pastoral image of itself, the 1990s and 2000s were a time to renegotiate that identity and provided an opportunity to acknowledge personal narratives that had long been repressed by the cultural pressure to conform to the Nationalist ideal. Individual histories of oppression and marginalization at the hands of the new Irish government were often hidden in order to preserve the overall national narrative of a moral, faithful, and civilized country. The literary landscape would be closely monitored and frequently censored well into the last decades of the twentieth century, but the public was no longer as invested in preservation of the repressive identity that censorship sought to preserve. Despite the modernity of much of its literature, particularly between the turn of the century and the 1930s,

¹ The concept of a singular representative Irish identity is best represented by the idealized image pursued by W.B. Yeats at the beginning of the twentieth century and refined by the nationalist agenda of de Valera's government to portray Ireland as a romanticized Catholic country, traditional in its morality and essentially homogenized.

politically and socially Ireland would maintain the antiquated imagery of a traditional, rural nation throughout the century.

In addition to the decidedly positive progression into modern community that the peace accord and booming economy initiated, there was also a crisis that could no longer be ignored by the country. Within the Catholic community a growing number of accusations of abuse and mistreatment against the clergy contributed significantly to the decline of the Church's influence in Ireland. With every allegation, victims found themselves returned to the scenes of trauma. The spaces where they should have found protection and care were once again sources of anxiety and fear instead. Emilie Pine, whose work explores memory and trauma in Irish literature and its place within an international discourse, suggests that a major difficulty in the revelation of these horrible experiences is that "they criticize a world that is now gone... despite being set in the recent past they are in many ways set on a different planet" ("Coming Clean?" 166). As a trickle of reports became a torrent, the government was forced to acknowledge victims who had for years (decades for some) been ignored or denied, resulting in several lengthy investigations. What emerges from these investigations is a nation confronted with memories of abuse and trauma that had been institutionally misrepresented in order to maintain the facade of irreproachable, postcolonial, moral identity and a country of citizens unsure of how to address the trauma uncovered by the investigations.

With the abundance of literary and non-literary discussion of times past, the argument has been made that the Irish seem to be obsessed with the past. There are a number of writers, like who have suggested that this obsession is the inspiration for much of the literary production of

Ireland in the last two centuries². Kiberd however, reads this ‘fixation’ not as an inability, or a disinclination, to move on from the troubled Irish past, but rather that “the Irish are obsessed with their power over it [the past], including the power to change its meaning whenever that seems necessary” (*The Irish Writer and the World* 280). This is demonstrated not only with the Revivalist writings of Yeats and his compatriots at the turning of the nineteenth century, but also throughout the late twentieth, and into the twenty-first century, with many Irish writers engaging with the past in order to negotiate their experiences of the present.

As Yeats’ work at the turn of the century seeks to create an idealized, romantic, vision of Ireland that could inspire his countrymen to organize and embody a national identity that supports the end of colonialism, the ability of that identity to represent a specific Irish experience is limited. Since the 1990s an expanding body of work revisits episodes of traumatic past, nationally and individually, in an effort to come to terms with those events as well as acknowledging the need to abandon the narrowly defined representation of what it means to be Irish. Seamus Deane, in his role as critic and author, responds to the Yeatsian tradition suggesting that “it is surely time to abandon such a myth and find intellectual allegiances elsewhere” (“Literary Myths of the Revival” 322). Deane, along with the other authors discussed in this paper, attempt to do exactly this by engaging with, and presenting stories that represent experiences which, although seldom discussed, have been widely shared by their fellow islanders.

This literary trend coincides with the emergence not only of a thriving Irish economy, and declining influence of the Catholic Church, but also with the field of Trauma Studies onto

² See articles written by Thomas Hachey, Lawrence McCaffrey, and Gregory Shirmir among a number of others. The assumption of this retrospective preoccupation is in general use across a variety of sources discussing the Irish relationship with the past.

the literary criticism landscape. Furthering the argument by Kiberd of the Irish renegotiation of the meaning of the past, Cathy Caruth, a prominent figure in Trauma Studies, states that history is “reclaimed and generated not in reliving unconsciously the death of the past but by an act that bears witness by parting from it” (*Literature in the Ashes of History* 9). In terms of the current trends in Irish literature, the desire to “bear witness” to the traumatic past and acknowledge its influence on the present struggles is part of the process of working through the long hidden events of that past while embracing modernity and the separation from those past events. In his text, *Irish Times: Temporalities of Modernity*, David Lloyd exposes a weak spot in this reading of literature, and the current incarnation of fixation on the past, namely, that the “relation to the past is strictly not a relation to one’s own past but to a social history and its material and institutional effects” (25). This is particularly true for Ireland, where history, particularly that of the last one hundred years, is still actively influencing the present.

Though Trauma Studies is a useful tool when engaging with literature in general, its psychoanalytical understanding of trauma does not fully encompass an important aspect of the cultural context of Irish literature implied by Lloyd, colonialism. Despite this limitation, Trauma Studies provides a functional starting point for looking at the narratives that are discussed in this paper. The characters in the texts have, no doubt, had to negotiate their worlds in response to traumatic events, but the representation of trauma, what it means, how it affects characters, and how it is dealt with, cannot be limited to just one approach.

For much of the twentieth century there was a political need to promote the nationalist inspired identity that grew out of the work of Yeats and his Revivalist compatriots. The country clung to the idealized morality and romanticized rural imagery, using it to differentiate itself from its former colonizer England, and from other, more cosmopolitan countries which were

potentially negative influences on the newly minted Republic. After partition both Northern Ireland and the Republic attempted to maintain control over narrowly defined national identities, which would ultimately lead to the suppression of many marginalized voices on both sides of the border. In Northern Ireland the partisan struggle over control of the region's political identity was based largely on the religious and political ideologies that were at odds, often resulting in violent confrontations, and disputed cultural memories. In the Republic the perception of Catholic morality and respectability would become the national master narrative, with any challenge of it shunted to one of many institutions which “obscured the less desirable elements attached to a number of interrelated social phenomena” (Smith 111). The experiences of survivors would leave deep scars (physically, emotionally, and psychologically).

Memories of these often traumatic experiences were hidden from the official narrative of the Republic from the late 1930s until the 1990s because to acknowledge them publically could have exposed the newly formed nation to doubts, domestically and internationally, that they were deserving of independence. The obsession with creating a perfect image, from the position of the political state, down to individual families would create a systematic denial of anything other than the pastoral, Catholic projection of Irish ‘culture’. To achieve this, institutions were set up that would become repositories for those individuals that did not fit with this ideal. Citizens were aware of these institutions, which would become the focal points of abuse scandals when victims began coming forward in the 90s. Similar institutions existed in Northern Ireland, but the overwhelming nature of partisan violence overshadows the already repressed stories of institutional abuse.

Although similar systems were used in many countries, Ireland’s network of state and Church-run facilities were places where inmates were often confined for an indeterminate length

of time. In “Remembering Ireland's Architecture of Containment: ‘Telling’ Stories in *The Butcher Boy* and *States of Fear*”, James Smith discusses how institutions such as Magdalene laundries, Mother and Baby homes, and Mental hospitals were used as social controls, particularly of women, who challenged the image of ‘purity’ the nation wanted to preserve³. For inmates who survived their experiences in those places, their accounts of abuse and mistreatment would never have been acknowledged because they were seen as disruptive to the cohesive order of the newly minted nation. It is only when Ireland began to move away from the central influences of the Church and nationalism that the claims of the victims would be recognized as legitimate and deserving of acceptance within the historical narrative of the countries.

Literary writers quickly began producing work to reflect this new scope of engagement with the past. This paper uses three such texts to examine the representation of trauma and demonstrate how the events of the past continue to haunt the present with unacknowledged stories, *The Secret Scripture* (2008), *The Gathering* (2007) and *Reading in the Dark* (1996). Although all three texts revolve around a central experience of trauma that reverberates through the diegetic timelines, each maneuvers history and memory in a different way. These novels have a decidedly autobiographical feel, with the author's rendering both the experiences of trauma, and the character's relationship with those events without trivializing the narratives they represent. For individual characters, the identification with the national experience is internalized and so their experiences mirror those of the wider community. The urgency to know and tell the

³ Magdalene Laundries forced women and girls who were deemed morally unsound into work under deplorable conditions in order to atone for their sins (real or perceived). Mother and Baby homes, also required atonement through work, but also removed children from the care of their mothers, either being adopted through the Catholic Church or being cycled through orphanages, if they survived childhood. Mortality rates for children at these institutions was quite high, though covered up until recent discoveries of mass graves. Confinement to these institutions, like psychiatric hospitals was often indefinite. Release could only be obtained by an inmate's family, the eventual payment of fees (for Mother and Baby homes), or escape.

truth about traumatic events is a driving force behind the motivations of each of the narrative voices. It is no longer an interest in idealism that drive the novels, but an investment in an authentic representation of the Irish experience.

For many authors, representing an authentic Ireland means exposing the trauma of Irish history. In *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, Caruth suggests that we can read the narrative of trauma “not as the story of the individual in relation to the events of his own past, but as the story of the way in which one’s own trauma is tied up with the trauma of another”(8). From this perspective, and in particular relationship to Irish literature, the novels that emerge in the 90s are not simply stories from the individual on the margins, but of the nation in its own attempt to regain its centrality within the narrative of Irish history. The novels discussed in this paper can be described as Trauma literature, Misery lit, faux memoir. There is, in the narrative structure of each text, the desire to uncover the ultimate truth at the heart of their traumatic experience. The departure from the scaffold of an idealized Irish identity is a major one and provides representation to formerly marginalized voices.

Sebastian Barry’s *The Secret Scripture* is the story of Roseanne McNulty, an elderly patient at Roscommon Mental Hospital. This text splits the narration between Roseanne, who is determined to write out her life’s history, and Dr. Grene, the attending Psychiatrist of the hospital. Their alternating narration demonstrates one of the main issues of testimony, authority over the ‘truth’. Barry is well known for using his own family history as well as marginalized historical experiences as inspiration for his writing and *The Secret Scripture* is no different. The character of Roseanne was inspired by a nameless aunt of Barry’s, excluded from the family history because she, like Roseanne, did not contain her sexuality within the acceptable venue of marriage. Roseanne is institutionalized after her marriage is annulled and she becomes pregnant

outside of marriage. The complex relationship between the Catholic Church and the asylums in this text go beyond punishment for Roseanne's Other status in the novel, and their involvement results in the transgenerational transmission of dysfunction to her son. This novel helps to demonstrate the bridge between the sociopolitical dysfunction of the nation and the domestic dysfunction of individuals following the partition of the island by highlighting not only the terrible treatment of women by the state, but also the very real loss experienced by those children removed from their parents care and, their cultural heritage, in order to maintain the facade of sexual purity.

Seamus Deane's *Reading in the Dark* is the second text that will be discussed in this paper. Deane, a prolific literary and cultural critic before publishing this novel, has created a 'semi-autobiographical' account of boyhood in Derry, Northern Ireland in the decades between Partition and the Troubles⁴. As the only text set in the North, and the only text to be narrated exclusively by a male narrator, *Reading in the Dark* appears at first to be a different kind of novel from the others, but as Deane's narrator frames his story it becomes clear that the family is haunted by the past. Although the novel follows the boy's experiences, his Uncle Eddie, who disappeared some twenty years before becomes the invisible center to the text. His 'ghost' haunts the family and although the nature of his disappearance is perpetually obscured, the narrator believes he has been able to uncover the truth. In this text it is not just the event of Eddie's death that is traumatic (particularly for the narrator's father), but the silence that envelops his death, transmitting the effects of that trauma through a second generation.

The final text is Anne Enright's *The Gathering*. Like Barry, Enright sets her novel in the current day but utilizes frequent forays into both an imagined past and the unreliable memories

⁴ In an interview with *The Guardian*, Deane describes the novel as inspired by experiences from his own family, as well as other families in his community growing up.

of the narrator's childhood. The reader is quickly made aware that this novel deals with trauma as the narrator, Veronica, details the emotional task of notifying her mother of her brother Liam's death in the opening chapter. While the narrative is fictional, Enright depicts the symptoms of trauma in such a genuine way that it has the feel of autobiography. What differentiates this text from the other two is that the traumatic event at the center of this novel is not overtly related to the socio-political landscape, instead the domesticity of the trauma is relevant to the representation of Ireland through the transmission of traumatic experience. It is in this novel that the cultural attention shifts from national crises surrounding institutional abuse into the domestic, individual experience of abuse that remains hidden from all but victim and perpetrator. Like *Reading in the Dark*, the silence that surrounds the traumatic experience reverberates through lifetimes and becomes a threat not just to the original victim, but to those closest to them.

In their negotiation with traumatic experiences these novels reveal both productive and dysfunctional ways of dealing with the residual impact of trauma. The decision to frame the novels from a first-person perspective lends the narratives a sense of ownership over the stories, regardless of their ability to represent the truth. The demand for authority over the narrative in order to make up for their inability to 'tell' their story within the text is a revolutionary act for characters that represent a marginalized experience. These are not attempts to revise history and substitute the marginalized for the majority, but rather demands for recognition of the marginalized. As reflections of the national and domestic histories of Ireland they can demonstrate why it is important to provide space in the historical narrative for these kinds of stories and help guide the way for locating a new basis for identity that encompasses formerly marginalized groups. Instead of maintaining the false image created by Nationalists at the birth

of the Republic, a more genuine, and authentic representation of a multifaceted Irish culture can emerge.

There are a number of critical perspectives that are used to develop my reading of these three novels. From the Trauma Studies field, Caruth's work on trauma and psychoanalysis in literature will be a foundation. Her work with literature informs my initial reading of the texts and my discussion of the representation of trauma in the novels as well as how the characters demonstrate traumatic behavior. Particularly significant is her argument, reflecting the Freudian definition of trauma, that the exact moment of trauma can never truly be known. In all three novels the characters continually seek the original source of dysfunction, but are never able to conclusively locate the moment. Additionally, she asks a question that is particularly relevant to the focus of this paper, "what does it mean for political history to be fundamentally linked, at certain points in modern times, to its erasure or lack of witness?" (*Literature in the Ashes of History* 39). The national identity of Ireland is intimately involved with the active silencing of witnesses, from the (inadvertent?) destruction of historical records during the Civil War and partition, and the execution of Irish citizens who would find themselves on the losing side of that war, to the censorship laws and community pressure to uphold the sense of morality enshrined in the Constitution.

Dominick LaCapra's work supplements gaps in the Trauma Studies analysis of these novels where the act of writing becomes my focus. Though fictional, the authors depict charged experiences of family, self, or members of the communities from where they write. Writing about trauma comes with certain responsibilities to society, and LaCapra's views on this aspect of trauma literature is influential when discussing the nature of narrative authority and testimony. That each novel attempts to represent a marginalized experience leaves them open to the critique

that they are attempting to use these stories to satisfy their own political perspectives. As he states in *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, “those traumatized by extreme events, as well as those empathizing with them, may resist working through because of what might almost be termed a fidelity to trauma, a feeling that one must somehow keep faith with it” (22); characters must perpetuate the traumatic experience in order to maintain its relevance to a community that does not wish to acknowledge it. The intentions of each author reflect their own interests in the traumatic nature of their character’s lives, but representing that trauma is not the primary goal, but rather a symptom of the experience that results from a uniquely Irish perspective. In a culture discouraged from discussing personal problems, silence becomes both an instrument of abuse, as well as an outcome of it⁵.

Both Declan Kiberd and David Lloyd provide a socio-historical perspective in my discussion of the formation of the Nationalist Irish identity and the difficulty of constructing a new national identity in a rapidly changing Ireland. Their combined work anchor the discussion of trauma and power to the realities of the Irish experience in the post-Partition Republic as well as Northern Ireland. Kiberd’s work is particularly helpful in demonstrating how one source of traumatic experience is not simply an act of violence, but the persistent difficulties that the narrators have with an unstable identity within a community where they are not ‘at home’ (*The Irish Writer* 204). Lloyd’s discussion of the Irish fixation on the oral in *Irish Culture and Colonial Modernity* provided the initial inspiration for looking at the presence, and absence, of speech in these texts, particularly for women, “the regulation of proper gendered spaces that was undertaken by Irish nationalism generated a set of prohibitions and exhortations that focus on the

⁵ Much like the claim that the Irish are obsessed with the past, the disinclination to discuss personal troubles is referenced in a number of articles and other texts, particularly when discussing mental illness and abuse. The stereotype is one particularly relevant here as it contributes to the nationalist representation of the Irish as self-reliant and, in contrast to their caricature by the English, in control of their emotions.

unruly mouth” (3). The rigid adherence to gendered space and enforced silence become mechanisms within the politically delicate State to control men and women, devaluing those voices that present a challenge to the community image.

The types of traumatic experiences represented in these texts depend on the interplay of memory and forgetting. Here is where the work of Paul Ricoeur is indispensable. Like Kiberd and Lloyd, Ricoeur discusses the responsibilities that come with remembrance and forgetting, and makes arguments for the value of both. Additionally, his perspectives on memory/forgetting within the context of trauma contribute to the understanding of the narrator in each novel and their desire to recover, or create, memories that support their faith in their own narrative. The discussion of memory is an underlying structure to every reading of these novels, and provides a scaffold to the analysis of representation, identity, trauma, and power.

Lastly, to discuss the persistent impact of authority on the events of the novels I incorporate Jacques Derrida’s theoretical work on hospitality. Derrida’s concept of hospitality informs my reading of these novels because it considers not only the negotiation of power and authority in the postcolonial nation, but also the necessity of forgetting within the conditions of hospitality. His focus on the “authenticity of hospitality” illustrates the transition from the national influence of colonial trauma to the domestic experience of abuse (*On Hospitality* 56). While generally viewed as an act of welcoming, hospitality is a nuanced relationship that functions on multiple levels, from the intimate relationship between two people to the more generalized exchange between cultures or specific communities. Derrida’s approach to analyzing these associations leads to a better understanding of the way characters relate to one another and the implications of those relationships within the novels.

This paper brings together all of these critical perspectives with my analysis of *The Secret Scripture*, *Reading in the Dark* and *The Gathering* in two chapters. The first chapter will discuss aspects of the novels that represent memory, and the manifestation of memory through specific acts and events. In *The Secret Scripture*, the narrative relationship with memory is unstable, and once Roseanne's own mistrust of her grasp on the past is revealed, the reader must make a decision to believe or not. Importantly, Roseanne's determination to write her story claims a right to narrative space that she had been denied in her youth by Fr. Gaunt and her in-laws. In this way, the slow progress of decolonization and evolution of community identity are reflected onto Roseanne's own personal development as a character. The frequent shifting between past and present in this text make it difficult to separate cause and effect, but accentuate the repetition of certain kinds of trauma.

Despite a lack of direct experience with the events at the heart of his family's dysfunction, the narrator of *Reading in the Dark* finds his life at the mercy of their influence, haunted by the disappeared. As he hears fragments of those events from other characters he finds it difficult to separate those bits of knowledge from memory. His excavation of family history, hoping to learn the truth, parallel the social need to recover the 'disappeared' from Northern Ireland's history, and the desire to commemorate the past by reconstructing vanished narratives.

In the other two texts knowledge of past events comes from first hand experiences, in Enright's *The Gathering* Veronica begins with a falsely constructed version of the past. Because of an obsessive desire to understand the origins of her family dysfunction in the absence of access to the moment of trauma, Veronica creates a family narrative that neither satisfies her need for knowledge, nor provides her with a resolution to the turmoil she experiences after her

brother Liam's death. The focus in this novel is on the intimate personal experience of abuse and the damage inflicted on multiple generations of a family.

Looking toward the past, as these novels do, to remember the source of the present is fraught with difficulties in representation. What these novels all demonstrate, with regards to memory, is that there is no single experience of an event or time that can serve as the authoritative representation "Historical remembrance in Irish national culture is", writes Richard Kearney, "a matter of hermeneutic interpretation involving some measure of selection or conflict, depending on who is telling and who is reading the narrative" ("Memory in Irish Culture" 138). Memory is an important factor through its role in the creation of how these characters define themselves, and formulate their sense of self. Instead of conforming to the dominant Yeats-inspired concept of Irishness, these narrators represent facets of their own Irish experience. What these novels offer in this capacity is the opportunity to recognize the subjectivity of memory and cultural history. As Ireland becomes a more diverse nation, acknowledgement of marginalized experiences will be crucial to the evolving national identity. As the island engages with its traumatic past, a single dominant narrative of history ceases to be useful, and instead one that allows for a multiplicity of perspectives to exist will emerge. Ensuring that narrative space exists for all perspectives, without attempting to deny or dismiss any other will be a difficult task, but one that Irish writers are embracing.

In the second chapter the focus will shift attention to the act of forgetting and the ways that forgetfulness is used in the novels to demonstrate either a dysfunctional relationship to trauma, or a healing one. With *Reading in the Dark*, the necessity of willful forgetting is a lesson learned too late by the narrator, damaging his relationship with both parents with his desire to uncover the truth of his family history. As the narrator pieces together the story of his uncles'

disappearances, his mother grows defiantly silent. At first refusing to speak of the past, his mother ultimately loses her ability to speak at all after sustained attempts to refuse acknowledgment of the fates of her brothers-in-law. The result is a continuation of family dysfunction and trauma that reflects the kind of political dysfunction that has been experienced in Northern Ireland in the decades since partition⁶. *The Gathering*, with its purely domestic focus, engages with the role silence plays in the transmission of traumatic experience and the failure of mothers, in particular, to interrupt the cycle of abuse. While a novel unconcerned with the political nation, it can be read as an indictment of Ireland for the history of abuse as well as the national devaluation of the female voice in testimony.

As a reminder of the potential for healing, the chapter will examine the treatment of forgetting and more importantly, forgiveness through *The Secret Scripture*. Having arguably endured the more personally devastating events of the three novels, Roseanne is able to not only locate a sense of self, but is able to forgive the world for its treatment of her. Though a comparatively positive attitude, the acknowledgement of Roseanne's past trauma and forgiveness ultimately leads to her continued status as Other, and raises the question of how a community can positively recover from acts committed so long ago. Roseanne's story is meant to be read, to be treated as an authority on par with the written testimony of Fr. Gaunt, given equal status and space. History cannot be rewritten, but it can become more inclusive, and its influence can be negotiated.

Forgetting and silence in each of the texts are markedly feminine traits. A significant change in the cultural experience, female silence appears in these novels to represent the loss of

⁶ Particularly the sectarian violence that dominated cultural experience in Northern Ireland from 1968 until the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1990. The inability for the government and the media to foster a multivoiced narrative contributed to the persistence of brutality from many corners. This exclusionary practice has negatively impacted efforts to promote reconciliation in the region.

cultural autonomy after the separation from England. As a colony, all Irish voices would be regulated, but after independence was won, the need to reconstruct Irish masculinity results in the subjugation of feminine traits, and ‘feminine’ weakness. What this does however is strip from women, and by extension Ireland itself, the ability to protect themselves and their children from abuse. The concerted effort of the country to distance itself from its traumatic past, embodied by political amnesia and institutional silence have transformed the national experience of trauma into an intimately domestic event, arguably more destructive than centuries of foreign rule. Ricoeur discusses this same issue stating, “a rigid and arrogant conception of cultural identity prevents us from perceiving... the possibilities of revising every story which has been handed down and of carving out a place for several stories directed at the same past” (“Reflections on a New Ethos for Europe” 7). By refusing to “hand down” those stories, revision becomes aggressive and contentious, exposing raw wounds to fresh trauma. If, however, the choice is made to acknowledge and validate the voices of the past, the possibility of healing exists.

Chapter 1: Remembrance through Narrative

The Secret Scripture: Marginalized Narratives and Truth

Sebastian Barry uses his work to highlight moments in Irish history that have been excluded from the construction of the national narrative. He selects characters who represent a forgotten aspect of the Irish experience, whose experiences have distanced them from mainstream historical remembrance. Subjected to a nationalist agenda, cultural or community memories will inevitably become either history or something between mythology and gossip. In

many cases, however, the memory of an individual is suppressed, forgotten, or even rewritten by those who are afraid of how that memory changes the accepted story. In his novel, *The Secret Scripture*, Sebastian Barry explores the conflict that arises between personal and ‘official’ memory⁷. Barry presents the difference, separating personal memory from history, through its medium; history in this text is always written, it is always available for reference, the standard by which stories are verified. The historical record is static and detached, qualities he uses to manipulate his characters and the sympathies we have for them. Jude Meche discusses Barry’s reputation as a revisionist, arguing that he “chooses to interrogate history through his choice of protagonists” focusing his work on “people marginalized until they have been practically erased from official histories” (“Seeking” 465). Women like his character Roseanne were denied a historical voice because they exposed a perceived weakness in the national character.

If history is reliable and stable, memory is fragile and prone to manipulation by time, experience, and external influences. Roseanne’s intent is to recount the circumstances that result in her confinement for more than half a century. The struggle in Roseanne’s narrative is her attempt to relay the truth and, as in the other two novels, truth is a concept that demands much of the narrator. The definition of truth, as being “in accordance with fact or reality” (“Truth”) straddles the very real difficulty encountered by Roseanne’s narrative. Fact can be verified by documentation, but reality is subjective and is influenced by individual perspective. Paul Ricoeur, in *Memory, History, Forgetting*, warns that “the constant danger of confusing remembering and imagining, resulting in memories becoming images ... affects the goal of faithfulness corresponding to the truth claim of memory” (7). In this text, memory is decidedly

⁷ Official memory is the adoption of a particular perspective as representation of events by the community. Official memory, as the chosen interpretation of history, may change depending on the community conveying the narrative.

oral, retaining an orality of style even when written down, allowing the reliability of memory to be questioned. History, represented in this text as Fr. Gaunt's documentation and the hospital records, is generally protected from similar interrogations by virtue of its perceived authority over the truth.

The Secret Scripture challenges us to read the marginalized voice of Roseanne as a part of a larger history in Ireland. One of the ways Barry does this is by not only giving Roseanne space to tell her story, but by presenting a parallel 'official' version of the events leading to her commitment to Roscommon Mental Hospital in the form of Fr. Gaunt's testimony as well as a third perspective, Dr. Grene, who is a representation of a contemporary society that must evaluate and judge the narratives presented. This novel is the most contemporary of the three discussed in this paper but spans the largest distance of time, and in a way sets Dr. Grene not only as the inheritor of a dysfunctional system with regards to the institution he runs but allows for his character to be a stand in for Ireland during a time when the country is finally confronting its own neglected history.

While the novel begins with Roseanne's voice, she will not have sole control of the narrative. The interruption of Roseanne's narrative by Dr. Grene's own story not only contributes to the perception of Roseanne as an unreliable narrator as he raises questions about her past, but disengages the reader from identification with Roseanne. Dr. Grene allows for distance to be maintained from both Roseanne's experiences, and the implication that the reader is included in the community that maintains her confinement. Our first introduction to her is the subtitle of the chapter, "Patient, Roscommon Regional Mental Hospital, 1957-" (Barry 3). Before learning anything about her, the text defines her as a patient in a hospital and the length of her stay suggests that she is not a stable individual. From this brief description we already know she

has spent 50 years in this institution and, if unfamiliar with the history of such institutions in Ireland⁸, the automatic inference would be that there is a psychological reason for her to be there. Before reading one word, we are hesitant to trust her story because her presence in a mental hospital suggests there is something wrong with her, that she is not to be taken seriously⁹. Roseanne begins her narrative with a poetic description of the town where she was born, and its influence over her:

That place where I was born was a cold town...

There was a black river that flowed through the town, and if it had no grace for mortal beings, it did for swans, and many swans resorted there, and even rode the river like some kind of plunging animals, in floods.

The river also took the rubbish down to the sea, and bits of things that were once owned by people and pulled from the banks, and bodies too, if rarely, oh and poor babies, that were embarrassments, the odd time. The speed and the depth of the river would have been a great friend to secrecy.

That is Sligo town I mean.

Sligo made me and Sligo undid me, but then I should have given up much sooner than I did being made or unmade by human towns. (Barry 3)

Beyond setting a scene that foreshadows sadness and misfortune, sub textually Barry also alludes to the source of Roseanne's experiences by placing her in an area that is associated with Yeats

⁸ As previously reference in the introduction to this paper, psychiatric hospitals were frequently used as social controls where people, predominantly women who were socially at risk or deemed morally unsound, would be committed indefinitely until their families agreed to have them released. Dr. Grene makes several comments about his belief that this was the reason for Roseanne's commitment.

⁹ By discrediting their claims, the church and state could control how inmates of these control institutions were perceived by the community, protecting those in charge from claims of abuse and mistreatment. It also created an environment of fear with the intention of keeping other 'at risk' individuals in check.

and the legacy of Irish identity he promoted¹⁰. This legacy will have everything to do with Roseanne's fate. If Barry's aim is to reveal a marginalized experience through Roseanne, it will be through a thorough "rejection of nationalist myth-making" (Piatek 158). His decision to select a woman who has been subjected to repeated trauma by the representatives of Ireland, instead of a woman who calls men to fight for her, not only illustrates the damage inflicted on Irish women by nationalism, but the country itself.

Barry begins Roseanne's narrative around the time of the Civil War, when personal and national identity, loyalty, and the complex colonial relationship between England and Ireland were in violent flux. Raised as a Presbyterian with an English mother, Roseanne is Irish by birth, but not the right kind of Irish for Sligo, or post-Civil War Ireland for that matter. As Ireland seeks to solidify a cohesive singular identity as a Catholic nation, her refusal to conform to pressure from Fr. Gaunt and the McNulty's leaves her vulnerable. As Ireland develops a national identity as not-English, her mixed heritage means that she is not wholly Irish, and yet, she and her father feel a deep connection to their country. Throughout the novel, Roseanne (and her family) will become a representative character for thousands of Irish who were victimized by the process of decolonization and nationalism. There is no room in the nationalist image of Irishness for plurality, and so people who straddle the boundaries, like the Clear's, are excluded from the community. Exclusion from the safety of the community is compounded by her resistance to conformity. Because she represents this Other in her community, she, and her family, are more

¹⁰ WB Yeats, along with other writers producing work between the turn of the century and into the period of Independence, sought to promote a unified Irish identity based on the idealized 'pre-colonial' mythology that they felt represented an Ireland that was untainted by influence from the English, this included strong moral guidance that was predominantly Catholic, and nationalistic in nature. De Valera incorporated this vision into the newly established Republic extensively, to the detriment of citizens that did not successfully embody this image.

closely watched and regulated by those in positions of authority, such as Father Gaunt and her future mother-in-law, Mrs. McNulty.

Although Roseanne is native born, she has more in common with the former colonizer than she does with the people in her town. She represents exactly what the nation is determined to define themselves against after partition¹¹. The newly declared republic needs to reflect a united, and flawless, sense of identity to the world to show that they are capable of, and deserving of independence from England. In one of the first stories that Roseanne relates, she illustrates the suspicion and doubt that she and her father were confronted with. As a group of men demand her father bury one of their number, he questions their right to a plot and they respond “the whole of Ireland is our plot. You can set us down in it anywhere. Because we are Irishmen. Maybe that’s something you don’t know anything about?” (Barry 39). Joe Clear, Roseanne’s father, replies and asserts his ownership of Irish identity, but will remain suspect. This same incident serves as our introduction to Fr. Gaunt and the influence he has over the community, but more particularly, his unsettling control over the Clear family.

A constant presence in the novel, Fr. Gaunt is not a kindly benefactor to Roseanne or her family. His facilitation of employment for Joe Clear, and his offers of guidance to Roseanne after her father's death are not hospitable gestures of support or protection, but rather attempts to force their assimilation into the Catholic community. His attempts to coerce the Clear family reflects the larger nationalist agenda of the new Republic. The further into Roseanne’s narrative we move, the more sinister Fr. Gaunt’s character becomes, with his looming presence depicted

¹¹ In his text, *Inventing Ireland*, Declan Kiberd asserts that just as the English developed their identity as English through negative comparison to the Irish, the Irish identity, during this time period, is trying to solidify itself as not-English. He also acknowledges that the Irish identity is highly nostalgic, frequently attempting to inhabit an ideal that is mythological, not an accurate representation of the Irish lived experience.

through both Roseanne's memories and his own deposition detailing her commitment. His repeatedly rebuffed attempts to pull Roseanne under his control willingly seem to aggravate his desire to circumscribe her femininity. The extreme detail of his testimony regarding Roseanne's commitment reflects a preoccupation with regulating her body and sexuality. Dr. Grene describes him as "a man who in his every utterance seemed to long for the banishment of women behind the front doors of their homes, and the elevation of manhood into a condition of sublime chastity ... there is something humorous about it now, there was nothing humorous about it then" (Barry 136)¹². The extent of Fr. Gaunt's abhorrence of uncontrolled feminine sexuality, viewed from a distance by Dr. Grene, is foolish, but the reality of his influence, and that of the clergy who inspired his character, would devastate many lives.

Through Fr. Gaunt's intervention Roseanne, like thousands of other women, would be locked away and deemed mentally ill (regardless of the accuracy of this label) so that her body could be controlled by the state and/or Church. When he announces that her marriage to Tom has been annulled, it is not enough for him to label her mentally ill, but must 'diagnose' her, "nymphomania is of course by definition a madness" (Barry 223), the sexuality that he sees in Roseanne is what he wants to control so that the idealized image of Irish womanhood can be preserved. Roseanne is nearing one hundred in the novel, and based on the events referenced in the text, she would have initially been incarcerated sometime around 1940-1 after giving birth to an illegitimate child; a period of time that found Ireland very willing to hide away evidence of

¹² Though meant to provide protected support to families of the new Republic, many of the policies included in the 1937 Constitution framed by Eamon de Valera were far more restrictive and overtly Catholic than previous versions, in particular the preferential references to the Catholic church and its doctrines and the "clearly subordinate and unequal role envisaged for women" (Bartlett 449). These shifts in national policy made it all the more likely that a woman such as Roseanne might find herself confined to an institution of control if she failed to properly inhabit the ideal of Irish womanhood.

their sins. Fr. Gaunt would no doubt have considered this a direct challenge to his authority, much like he did when he provided employment for Roseanne's father.

Having no opportunity to speak for herself, Roseanne would be first shunned by the community as abject Other for her religious beliefs and heritage, then further rejected for her status as an unwed mother. Abandoned in the tiny shack on the edge of town and later confined in institutions where she would have no control over her fate, Roseanne loses all connection to the community, and her identity. Experiences like Roseanne's also serve a purpose in the community, not simply a punishment, institutionalization "functioned as a constant reminder of the social morals deemed appropriate in post -independence Catholic Ireland and the consequences awaiting transgressors of that morality" (Smith 113). Controlling Roseanne's body meant that it might be easier to control other women in the community that could be vulnerable to the same 'temptations', enforcing an ideal Irish womanhood that demanded silence, obedience, and loyalty to a specific hierarchy of male control; this was especially true for vulnerable women who already occupied the margins of the community.

Community power and influence are the driving force behind Roseanne's incarceration for more than half of the history of the Republic of Ireland. Her rejection of the idealized expression of Irishness demonstrated by her mother-in-law not only gives the community an excuse to exile her, it makes it easier to dehumanize her and subject her to a system that would abuse her. Reading Roseanne's narrative is a recounting, from multiple vantage points, of the trauma she has endured through her long life. She has been a marginal witness to the entire history of modern Ireland and has survived despite finding herself repeatedly exposed to traumatic experiences. As a long term patient at the hospital, she has lived the majority of her life in a forgotten world. She has never before been given the opportunity to share her personal

history with others and now, as Dr. Grene attempts to uncover her past she is unable to give voice to her memories. Roseanne has discovered through the course of her life that a woman's voice is powerless. The legal status of women in Ireland, particularly at the time of Roseanne's commitment, is valid only through her male relationships, if married her husband is her conduit of protection, unmarried it is her father. After her annulment, Roseanne has the shelter of neither, and is vulnerable, her voice, lacking appropriate channels of expression, is ignored.

The oral tradition of Irish culture is supplanted by print as an English colony, which David Lloyd attributes to the attempt of the colonizer to control the native Irish, a process that would be appropriated by Nationalists after Independence towards women to aid in "the reconstruction of Irish masculinity and the regulation of gendered spaces ... [creating] a set of prohibitions and exhortations that focus on the unruly mouth" (*Irish Culture* 3). Through the colonial relationship with England, Irish masculinity is inferior, unrefined and uncivilized; as the country reconstructs its concepts of gender roles nationalism sought to redefine masculinity through the promotion of an Irish interpretation of Victorian ideals. Men assumed superiority over women, sexuality was obsessively controlled by the Church and community. Traditional oral culture, seen as an outlet for the uncivilized passion nationalism attempted to distance the country from, became strictly regulated in order to monitor any potential dissent. The 'unruly mouth' could destabilize the tenuous grasp the nation had over its self-perception of as a modern culture.

Fr. Gaunt, and the national government sought to control those 'unruly mouths' by controlling the bodies they were connected to. For women especially, any behavior that did not conform to expectations, like Roseanne's pregnancy or extramarital encounters, would have been viewed as a threat to community morality. Jack Fenell uses the term 'siege culture' to describe

de Valeran Ireland, which encompasses the time frame when Roseanne is first committed after she gives birth to her child. What he means when he refers to a siege culture is that the political/moral authority has exaggerated “an external threat to the (Catholic, middle class) family” (“Siege Cultures” 77). Fear of such a threat encourages the community to be suspicious of those who do not fit. As a vulnerable Other already, Roseanne would not find sympathy from the community once she could be viewed as a moral threat, willing to engage in extramarital affairs. It would not be difficult to imagine the kind of reception Roseanne would have received from the other women in Sligo and Strandhill after her annulment.

As a victim of this social policing, Roseanne has learned that her voice carries very little authority, regardless of the truth of her narrative. Barry uses her story to illustrate how the rhetoric of postcolonial nationalism constructs its particular image of morality. The devaluation of voices like Roseanne’s is an active policy undertaken to reinforce a historical narrative that attempts to dictate how future generations will remember the past. Faced with an unpredictable, but inevitably close death due to her advanced age, her desire to write down the story of her life is not just an alternative to speaking with Dr. Grene. Although her writing is eloquent and unreserved, she assumes that she alone will find value in her memories or her endeavor to “write out [her] life on unwanted paper - surplus to requirement ... some kind of brittle and honest minded history” (Barry 4-5). Even if she does not intend for any other person to ever find it in her lifetime, her written account will last far longer than her spoken words to Dr. Grene will, and as a written account it leaves little room for interrogation of those memories, something Roseanne is frequently concerned about. It is her own projection of the past, a demand for remembrance from future readers.

In his first real attempt to learn concrete information about her commitment, Dr. Grene labels her evasive answer regarding her memories as a “beautiful description of traumatic memory” (Barry 101). Roseanne “remember[s] terrible dark things, and loss, and noise, but it is like one of those terrible dark pictures ... you cannot see a thing in them” (Barry 110). As Roseanne records her memories on paper, she leaves gaps, like these ‘dark pictures’ that cannot be identified. Reading her testimony through the perspective of Trauma Studies, these moments of absence reflect the traumatic experiences that Roseanne has survived, “traumatic memory thus totters between remembrance and erasure, producing a history that is, in its very event, a kind of inscription on the past ... a history constituted by the erasure of its traces” (Caruth *Literature* 78). The true potential of those traumatic memories is not revealed until compared with the testimony of Fr. Gaunt, who despite his skewed perspective of Roseanne, was probably the more factually reliable. His testimony, while providing potential facts that can be corroborated, is still suspicious. Dr. Grene describes his writing as though “he is unburdening himself, as he might a sin” (Barry 151) and that there is “an anxiety that expresses itself sometimes in excessive, or I should say unexpected, detail ... [he] is almost clinical in his anatomizing of Roseanne’s sexuality” (Barry 230).

The authority of testimony is linked to identity in this text because those inhabiting the margins, like Roseanne and John Kane (the hospital janitor and Roseanne’s apparent guardian angel) are deemed unreliable. In addition to their perceived impaired mental faculties, Roseanne and John Kane exist without a sense of personal history. It is only through Roseanne’s bold act of writing down her memories in an attempt to solidify the evidence of her existence that she becomes more than simply a patient for Dr. Grene. Her determined claim of ownership over her own life, and her ability to advocate on her own behalf, something she had been denied since

before her commitment, is never fully executed, but the revelations that emerge after John Kane rescues her manuscript restore both of their histories and re-humanize them for Dr. Grene and the reader. Roseanne's narrative is engaging, as the primary narrative it should be, but as she often states, it may not be the entire truth. She acknowledges gaps, or confusions in time, but is unable to resolve them, for instance, when she writes about waiting for her the news of her annulment, "dear dear God, I am trying to remember. Forgive me, forgive me if I am not remembering right. I would rather remember aright than just to remember things so they will stand in my favor. That luxury is not allowed to me" (Barry 220). Barry makes Roseanne an unreliable narrator but her desire to faithfully represent her experiences makes her sympathetic. The reality her memories record is shadowed by trauma, but her determination to reach the truth of them will always be questionable because they cannot be corroborated to our satisfaction.

There are multiple moments in her testimony sections where she is not sure if she is remembering correctly, or in the right order, or just imagining something, and she knows that as the marginalized voice, she cannot afford the 'luxury' of being incorrect. Her narrative moves, often with very little transition, between past and present and even between different moments in the past, casting doubt on her memories. While her frequent reference to her inability to be sure she is remembering correctly makes her an unreliable narrator, she also inspires more sympathy, especially when her narrative is confronted with the testimony of Fr. Gaunt. Sarah Herbe discusses this issue at length in her article, "Memory, Reliability and Old Age in Sebastian Barry's *The Secret Scripture*". Herbe suggests that in addition to the assumed memory lapses to be expected of a woman Roseanne's age, we should also be mindful that she is writing her testimony with an audience in mind. The gaps that exist could be natural, attributed to old age, or trauma, or they could be deliberate, a crafting of the image that Roseanne hopes to leave behind

(38). She has occupied the role of Other for so long, creating gaps in her narrative allows Barry to emphasize the humanizing aspects of her experiences. It is not as important to access memories of all the days she spent while her marriage was annulled, or even how long that process took, but the memories that are conveyed are experiences that are relatable. Regardless of Roseanne's intentions, rebuilding the connections to the community is Barry's attempt to restore her presence in the community. The erosion of those connections is what leads to Roseanne's current position, their restoration makes the community accountable for their treatment of her.

The version of herself that Roseanne offers to her audience is naive, with a belief that family can and will protect her from the world. As she is abandoned repeatedly, first by the death of her father and the commitment of her mother, then later by the annulment of her marriage and her commitment by her former in-laws, she finds herself with fewer and fewer resources to maintain her independence. She is unable to stand against the testimony of Fr. Gaunt, his influence as a priest is far more powerful than that of an orphan Presbyterian. Her mother-in-law is also a formidable antagonist as she represents what is expected of a good Irish wife and mother should be: silent, devout, and committed to the morality imposed by the Catholic majority. Sadly for Roseanne, it is most likely because Mrs. McNulty has a questionable past of her own that she is so willing to distance herself and her sons from Roseanne. Referred to as "vicissitudes" in her own past, she is determined to protect her family from a similar experience (Barry 209). A carefully crafted image has been created and presented to the community/audience in order to protect her image and her place within the community.

The perception of the individual by others is a reflection of the construction of Ireland's representation in the twentieth century. As long as the image of stability and morality is upheld,

the country is in control, Mrs. McNulty is an example of this. There have been rumors about her behavior and her son was a member of the RIC, but she is able to maintain the image expected of a good Irish woman. Roseanne's delayed attempt to do the same, and reclaim a narrative space for her experiences is also Barry's attempt to "rescue figures adrift in history's flood, and salvage a sense of belonging ... redeeming the forgotten, marginalized and awkward minor actors in Irish history" (R. Foster 197). Leaving behind a written testimonial ensures that Roseanne and the women she represents are not forgotten by history. Dr. Grene, must compare Roseanne and Fr. Gaunt's testimonies to evaluate who is telling the truth, but neither can be considered the only truth because each has an agenda in telling their story. As twentieth century Ireland became twenty-first century Ireland, the importance of stories like Roseanne become pivotal pieces in the development of the new Irish identity. The acknowledgement of the trauma that Roseanne, and women like her, experienced is also a realization that this was not abuse inflicted upon her by a foreign oppressor, but her fellow citizens. Her experience is a valid, and widely shared one, that deserves to have a place in the national narrative.

Reading in the Dark: Traumatic Revelations

History is subjective, what is accepted as truth has often been influenced heavily by those who have an interest in maintaining authority over the story being told. That power may be over an individual, a whole family, or a larger community, even a country. In Ireland, the dominant narrative has changed over the last one hundred years, from colonizer to Revivalist to Nationalist, and with it, the image of what it means to be Irish. "Memory is used strategically", argues Barbara Misztal, "not merely to explain the group past but also transform it into a reliable identity source for the group present" ("Memory and History" 3). The memories of historical events which are incompatible with the accepted version of the story are dismissed, or hidden in

order to create a narrative that tries to reinforce the dominant concept of truth. In Ireland as well as Northern Ireland, the narrative of history is a delicate network of events linked together by trauma and politics. In Seamus Deane's *Reading in the Dark*, the complexity of this network is revealed through stories told to the narrator by his family and other members of the community.

Storytelling is an essential act in this novel, not just for the narrator, but for the other characters as well. Telling stories helps the community define its identity, and convey the shared experiences that provide a unifying sense of history. Within the context of Northern Ireland's political imbalances, the stories told in Catholic and Protestant communities may touch on the same event, but their perspective changes the significance of that event, and how those experiences are presented. Stories are told with the ability to humanize, or dehumanize their subjects, to dislocate and subvert the truth when it becomes too dangerous to address. As in *The Secret Scripture*, the ability to distance the community from a particular experience, or person, allows the community to maintain the insular perspective of identity. Divided communities, like Derry in *Reading in the Dark*, rely on storytelling to nourish distrust and separatism from the Other community. This is best demonstrated by the chapter "Accident". The narrator is an eye witness to the accident, and to the sympathetic reaction of the police, but is uncomfortable with the humanization of the police because of his conditioned distrust of them. This discomfort is alleviated once the community has reframed the story to blame the reckless police for the child's death.

Bracketed by the Troubles of the 1920s and the 1970s, Deane's novel maneuvers through narratives that are both political and deeply personal for the narrator. Growing up Catholic in Northern Ireland creates a certain experience shared by Deane and the narrator. The political structure of the time means this experience is one of the subaltern. His religion marks the

narrator as Other as much as his family's economic or political status would. The residual reputation as the family of an informer will shape his experience as much as his identity as a Catholic will determine his daily reality in Derry. Deane's goal for the novel is to show how "ordinary life is destroyed by politics in our part of the world, generation after generation" (Fraser 9), and indeed, three generations of families are impacted by the violence of Partition, decades after those events take place. Deane's focus on the 'ordinary life' in Derry also illustrates how political inequity relies on narrative power to maintain balance and control in communities like Derry where reputation and family are tools used to enforce order. By denying the opportunity to voice their experiences as victims, the Protestant majority controls the ability for Catholic (or Republican) to participate in the creation of Northern Irish identity. Community perception is a powerful tool in the arsenal of power, one that Deane demonstrates most effectively throughout the text by showing how the group manipulates the individual, in the narrator's case by social isolation, in order to enact punishment for potential transgressions.

The secrets of Catholic Derry play a larger role than simple family history. The partisan history of Northern Ireland is one of retribution, a bloody feud that has only recently been declared over¹³. But the late 40s and 50s however, "have acquired a rosy hue in the mind of those who lived through them" (Bartlett 484) with a comparatively leveled experience of inactive tension in Northern Ireland. It is in this period of relative peace that the narrator of *Reading in the Dark* is first introduced to the secrets his family has hidden for decades. These secrets haunt the family, as the absent origin of their lives. Sitting at the kitchen table and at the feet of his relatives, the narrator listens to sanitized versions of stories of the family ghosts, Uncles Eddie

¹³ The signing of the Good Friday Agreement in April of 1998 intended to cease all claimed partisan affiliated violence.

and Tony McIlhenny. The conjectures of his remaining uncles roiling the fates of the two missing ones so that they seem like fairytales.

For the narrator memory and knowledge are difficult to separate, his accumulation of pieces of Eddie's story is committed to memory, but it is not his memory. As information is gathered, he imagines aspects of the story that have been left out. The narrator is, as Eoin Flannery describes, "utterly dependent on received narratives" ("Reading" 76) in his journey of constructing the whole of the family secret. Throughout his narrative, the narrator, and the reader in turn, gathers pieces together, joining them together as best he can. As with any community mythology¹⁴, there is an element of factual basis that reveals itself in the telling. Although the narrator's accounts of days in school, and time spent at the cinema are important to Deane's concept of 'ordinary life', the essential narratives of the text which reveal the most are always conveyed through someone else's memory. In his life the most frequent storyteller is his aunt Katie. During her tale about the two children who change, the narrator encounters a feeling that will be repeated often throughout the text, "I wanted her to stop, not knowing why ... I wished my mother would come awake, or that someone would come in and interrupt" (Deane 68). He is instinctively anxious at the revelation of tales that have meaning for his understanding of the world. Knowledge initiates him into the adult world, a world he may not be ready to inhabit and one he can never return from.

The stories told by Katie, Crazy Joe, and his brother Liam, are community myth. They are repeated and repeated, as is the story of Rory Hannaway's accidental death, to reframe events in a way that somehow benefits the communities understanding of the world they live in. The

¹⁴ I use the term community mythology to refer to a story, or stories, that have an important role in establishing community history, but that may be too controversial or may not fit within the parameters of historical narrative. These stories lend themselves readily to the dissemination of propaganda designed to maintain community prejudices or prescribed behaviors.

anxiety aroused by the narrator's witnessing a Police officer's demonstration of human reaction to tragedy is remedied when the community adjusts the story to lay the blame at the feet of the same officer. The narrator explains that hearing the new version of events "allayed the subtle sense of treachery I had felt from the start. As a result I began to feel then a real sorrow for Rory's mother and for the driver" (Deane 11). It is only after the story matches his conditioned expectations can he process the event that he witnessed. To see the police as capable of human feeling makes it more difficult to see them as the enemy, more difficult to maintain distance from them and avoid further association with Eddie's informer reputation. As he will eventually learn, any allegiance with the police is regarded suspiciously by the community. The police, primarily represented by Sergeant Burke, have access to layers of stories that are unavailable to the community, and they know how to use this information to influence others. It is Burke after all who tells the narrator who the real informer in his family was.

There are lessons to be learned through the local legends that are passed down, important ways of learning how to maneuver through the community. The stories are coded in order to protect information that is either too dangerous to be spoken plainly, as in the cases of Larry McLaughlin, or in Rory and Bridget's case, too far outside the range of community experience. Katie herself suggests that the take away from Bridget's story is that "it's a curse a family can never shake off. Maybe its something terrible in the family history, some terrible deed that was done in the past" (Deane 68). The stories themselves may not hold kernels of truth in them, but the reason for their telling, the warning that comes with them, is always a reference to the original experience. Katie's story of Bridget and the children who disappeared, and Joe's story about Larry who was left silent after his encounter with the devil instill an idea that families are haunted by their past. The present is interrupted by the past through this idea of haunting, the

lasting legacy of decisions and actions echo through generations of the community. For the narrator's family, as well as Northern Ireland, the aftermath of partition reverberates through multiple generations, long after direct engagement with the experience is over.

Lacking access to the original experience, knowledge of events, like Eddie's death, can only be conveyed through memory. The reliance on memory, and the potential for gaps (intentionally or not) means that the narrator is conscious of the limitations of his own knowledge. He is caught between curiosity to learn more, and anxiety of what that knowledge will mean for him later. Initially it is his father's family that are holders of a secret, "so broken was my father's family that it felt to me like a catastrophe you could only live with if you kept it quiet" (Deane 42). The missing brother, the family feud, sisters neglected by extended family, these are the things Frank (the narrator's father) cannot bring himself to discuss because of the shame. Gabriele Schwab, writing about the experience of receiving traumatic stories contends that "some histories, collective and personal, are so violent we would not be able to live our daily lives if we did not at least temporarily silence them ... Too much silence, however, becomes haunting" (*Haunting Legacies* 46). If left alone, these secrets would simply pass away quietly, and the family might move on. Eddie's reputation as an informer is rumored around the community, but had it been left undisturbed, he could possibly have been forgotten. The narrator's run in's with the police stir up these rumors and keep them alive and attached to a new generation of the family.

The narrator's revelation about his mother's culpability, and his grandfather's direct involvement in Eddie's death has far more damaging implications within the domestic realm of the narrator's experience. Although the risk of community backlash is comparatively low, disclosing the information he has learned with anyone runs a very high risk of damaging his

family beyond repair. He is compelled to seek as much information as he can garner, knowing the whole time that his accumulation of secret information makes him dangerous to his entire family. Processing the memories shared with him becomes problematic, this postmemory, as Oona Frawley terms it, has the effect of having it “seem to be immediately and personally received ... because of the weight attached to those memories and to the trauma [associated]” (“Towards a Theory” 30)¹⁵. The narrator begins to internalize the trauma of his uncle’s death because he is experiencing, secondhand, the trauma of knowing of Eddie’s innocence and being unable to appropriately process this knowledge without revealing to someone the extent of his awareness. It is safer to continue the lie that Eddie was an informer.

This experience of postmemory means that the narrator is, like the McLaughlin’s, cursed by “something terrible in the family history, some terrible deed that was done in the past” (Deane 68). For Deane it is not just the narrator who is burdened by postmemory, but the entire country. His intentions for this text were to document the need to abandon, politically and within the families impacted, the creation of postmemory. By continuing with such a tradition of communicating past trauma it leaves community wounds raw, interrupting the cycle of transmission, in Deane’s perspective, is the only productive option (Fraser 9). Even though Frank may have shared his belief about Eddie’s disappearance with each of the children, or at the very least Liam and the narrator, only the narrator is in a position to receive the grandfather’s confession, or Katie’s suspicions about McIlhenny which allow him to fit all the stories together.

¹⁵ According to Marianne Hirsch, ‘Postmemory’ “describes the relationship that the ‘generation after’ bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before-to experiences they “remember” only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right. Postmemory’s connection to the past is thus actually mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation. To grow up with overwhelming inherited memories, to be dominated by narratives that preceded one’s birth or one’s consciousness, is to risk having one’s own life stories displaced, even evacuated, by our ancestors. It is to be shaped, however indirectly, by traumatic fragments of events that still defy narrative reconstruction and exceed comprehension”.

His attempt to understand all that he has learned, reflected in the awareness that “an election had to be made between what actually happened and what I imagined” (Deane 188), is an attempt to process a traumatic memory that was not his to begin with.

In addition to the burden of knowledge he now carries, the narrator finds that he also the keeper of anniversaries, dates commemorating the meaningful events of his family history.

I watched on the dates of the various anniversaries that I thought she must remember and mourn or celebrate in a year. The beginning and end of her relationship with McIlhenny, the death of Eddie, the birth of Maeve, the disappearance of McIlhenny, marrying my father, Una’s death, her mother’s, her father’s death, our births, Maeve’s marriage. While my father, ignorant of McIlhenny, had some of these things and perhaps the feud, his parents’ death, Ena’s death - they were more intertwined than he knew, more so than she had ever wanted (Deane 240).

The narrator believes that behind the silence of his mother, she still finds his knowledge to be a threat, despite his efforts to show her that he has not shared the secrets he has learned. By observing these anniversaries the narrator disregards his mother’s frequent request, “can’t you just let the past be the past?” (Deane 42). Through his promise to his mother to never reveal the secrets they share, he is forced to declare loyalty to one or the other of his parents; to preserving the tenuous peace of the present, or reclaiming Eddie’s reputation by revealing the truth. Regardless of his choice, he risks inflicting damage onto his family relationships.

His situation is similar to the cultural and political status of Northern Ireland, particularly after the Peace Accord is signed. The commemoration of particular historical events is always fraught with conflict and deep meaning to all communities. New generations hold to these events

of cultural memory as ingrained in their social identity, but, like the narrator, only have a second- (or third, or fourth) hand relationship to the original memory. The transgenerational trauma that is engendered through the continuation of ritual commemoration, according to Gabrielle Schwab, “makes future generations vulnerable to repetition and opens history to new cycles of violence” (*Haunting Legacies* 99). In our narrator’s case, he inherits the family trauma eagerly, but then becomes burdened by the implications of the legacy.

The urgency of the narrator’s desire to tell the truth about his family history, “the truth was swollen inside me” (Deane 202), and the realities of what that truth means for his family can only be relieved by the act of writing. In an interview with Nick Fraser after the publication of *Reading in the Dark*, Deane discusses the necessity of waiting for his mother to pass before publishing because “some of it did happen, and some of it didn’t” (“A kind of life sentence” 9). The narrator must find a way to alleviate his burden, and chooses to preserve the story in writing, but encodes it in a language that neither of his parents can read. The act of writing, as in *The Secret Scripture*, means that the bits and pieces of Eddie’s fate are now documented. They will outlast the narrator, and both of his parents. Though inaccessible because it is written in Irish, the story “about local history” (Deane 202) is signal enough to his mother. Access to the truth is fragmented, while there are many people who have a memory of Eddie’s death, each relates to the event differently. Frank knows his brother is shot for being an informer, but does not know if of his innocence. The burden of knowledge for the narrator’s mother, who knows more about the circumstances of Eddie’s death than anyone, forces her to remain silent. Without the ability to safely share the information as he has, she not only compromises her marriage, but her status as a mother during her resulting breakdown. Her request to the narrator that “just for that one day, the

seventeenth of May, to forget everything. Or at least not to be reminded of it” (Deane 235) is her request of a safety valve.

In this novel, the trauma experienced by this family is not the events of Eddie and McIlhenny’s disappearances, though both have huge ramifications for the family and the community. What is traumatic is the absence of their narratives from family and community history. Eddie’s reputation as an informer colors the experiences of the narrator, his father, and brother Liam. In two episodes, the narrator exposes his family to the repetition of community suspicion by involving himself with the police, even though he has been socially conditioned to be aware of how his actions will be perceived by others. The first, after he displays his father's gun, he reflects, “since we had cousins in gaol for being in the IRA, we were a marked family and had to be careful. Young as I was, I was being stupid” (Deane 29). Youth is no excuse because even seemingly innocent situations like this have the potential for extreme repercussions. The violence of this experience haunts him for months, giving him nightmares. Although traumatic, he is able to move on. The possible involvement with the IRA would not result in the social isolation that being labelled an informer eventually does.

The second episode is far more influential for the narrator’s experience with his family’s reputation. When he gets involved with Sergeant Burke by throwing the rock at the police car Burke, knowing more than just Eddie’s reputation, manipulates the appearance of their interaction, knowing that social perception “once an informer, always an informer” (Deane 101) will be more of a punishment than anything else for someone in the narrator’s position. The shame associated with being an informer, even a falsely accused one, is a powerful motivator to keep the narrator in line. His family is ashamed to have been once again associated with betrayal. The issue of the narrator’s loyalty to his family becomes quite powerful in his development as a

character, and as a young man. He is in possession of information that could destroy his family's peace and his loyalty to his mother requires disloyalty to his father and to his uncle's memory. His and his mother's silence are the only things protecting his family from the full impact of traumatic memory.

The absence of Eddie and McIlhenny from the community creates lacunae in the narrative of this family. As the community does, it seizes upon any information it has access to fill those gaps and creates folklore to explain these absences. Under the circumstances, Eddie's disappearance is linked to the potential of his betrayal and he is executed, in reality as well as community history. In the tumultuous years between the Easter Rising and the end of the Civil War, many would meet similar fates and Eddie's death would be a warning to the community against disloyalty. Eddie's fate is tragic because he was innocent, his legacy is traumatic because his memory becomes taboo due to the nature of his 'crime' and its lasting influence over the family. There is one event, Eddie's death, at the center of this novel, but there are multiple stories about how the event unfolded, and this, more than anything else is the difficulty of history. As the narrator attempts to construct his identity in terms of his family and his community, the secret of Eddie's innocence frustrates the narrator's ability to do so. The need to keep silent distances him from his family and from fully accepting his complex family history. Unable to communicate the truth of Eddie's death, both the narrator and his mother are haunted by his absence.

McIlhenny, the actual informer, is converted into a quasi-hero after his sudden disappearance. There is a lack of information about the circumstances so only speculation can fill the gaps. Conveyed to America, he also becomes a taboo subject in the family, but because his betrayal was domestic, not political, his abandonment of Katie and Maeve is not registered on

the same level as Eddie. The judgment of McIlhenny is confined to marital (in)fidelity, as Katie's brother Manus asserts his suspicions "never trusted him myself. Too much the charmer, always the ladies' man" (Deane 37), he is simply a feckless husband. His absence however has more significant meaning to Katie's father and sister, who must keep the secret of his disappearance or risk having to disclose the reality of Eddie's fate, a risk that is too hazardous to take.

The absence of both men result in the repetition of trauma for this family, but it is betrayal that causes the trauma and allows it to permeate through the family. Katie, known for her fantastic stories, tells the narrator "a true one for a change" (Deane 182), sharing how abruptly he left, and the sense that he would never return, but also that "she had never been forgiven, not by her father, not by her own sister ... [and] was being punished again for something that was no fault of her own" (Deane 181). The narrator's mother tries, by insinuating that history will be repeated by Maeve and her new husband, to reconfigure the narrative of McIlhenny's disappearance. He is less dangerous as a truant husband than as the informer she know him to be. The truth is too perilous. Crazy Joe tells the narrator, "that's what punishment does; makes you remember everything" (Deane 201). His mother is punished by her memories of McIlhenny, but has no opportunity for reprieve, so she must make sure that those memories do not escape to harm anyone else.

Silence is his mother's only method of protection over her family. Revelation of her truth would replace her husband's, and Katie's, processed acceptance of the past with fresh trauma. Exposure of her access to the truth would continue the cycle of trauma instead of interrupt it. Once again, Schwab makes an excellent point, "the buried ghosts of the past come to haunt language from within, always threatening to destroy its communicative and expressive function"

(*Haunted Legacies* 49). Refusing, and then losing, the power to speak about the past is not simply a denial of the past, but rather the inability to acknowledge that past influences the present, regardless of having permission to do so, and contributes to the repetition of old trauma through her children's generation. The narrator's (and Deane's) own communication of the family history can only come once the victim's generation has passed on, thereby attempting to address their 'ghosts'.

The Gathering: Narrative Uncertainty of Traumatic Memory

Anne Enright's novel, *The Gathering*, begins with an 'uncertain' memory and is driven by the desire to locate an authentic memory, "I would like to write down what happened in my grandmother's house the summer I was 8 or 9, but I am not sure if it really did happen. I need to bear witness to an uncertain event" (Enright 1). The narrator, Veronica, is a middle-aged suburban mother in the middle of a family crisis. Her brother Liam has committed suicide in England and he must be brought home and laid to rest.

In the aftermath of his death, Veronica is compelled to reconstruct his life in an effort to establish and define the moment that put her favorite brother on the path that ended in the ocean in Brighton. This reconstruction must, according to Veronica, "start long before he was born" (Enright 13) as the seeds of his destruction are sown two generations before their own. Bridget English, in her discussion of *The Gathering*, makes an argument linking Veronica's story to the current national condition, "in the case of Ireland, the traumas resulting from repressed grief and unrecoverable losses are just beginning to be understood ... Paving over a painful or traumatic past results in a society that can never heal" and further, "suggests that the past must be reexamined, the pain exposed before grief can be overcome" ("Laying Out the Bones 204).

Unlike the other two novels, the certainty of the original trauma is unknown for Veronica, even though she is able to recognize the resulting symptoms of trauma in both herself and her brother after his suicide. She is compelled to investigate her own memories in order to locate the moment of trauma.

Although Veronica has been haunted by the events of this particular summer, she has not addressed the influence they have had on her life. Recognizing the pain Liam was trying to escape initiates her own reexamination of their past. The narrative is ‘written’ from the present, recounting events and interactions from the past, but the past is disordered; recent past and events from before she is even born are confused, dislocated from their proper sequence. The diegetic chronology of the novel is roughly five months from the opening event of Veronica’s delivery of the news of Liam’s death to her mother, and the final event of her return from an attempted flight from her marriage with the intentions of sharing with her family the ‘uncertain event’ she refers to in the first page of the text. Enright, through Veronica, engages with the disorientation of trauma, and the domesticity of the confrontation of its origins.

The trauma of her brother’s death initiates a profound disruption of Veronica’s life, with her attentions shifting from the primacy of her identity as a mother to a rejection of that identity. Her association of motherhood to irresponsibility and the consequences of absent mothers with the trauma of which she is uncertain has occurred complicates her own desires to move beyond that for her own children. The nationalist imagery of the maternal role in Ireland is romanticized, but the excessive fertility of the Hegarty family appears to be a reflection of an even older Irish concept of motherhood, one that is cast as indecent because it is a demonstration of a lack of control. Veronica attempts to embody this idea of maternal respectability by only having two children, and focusing all her attention on them, however maternal abandonment is repeated as

Veronica finds herself inhabiting an alternative version of her world after her brother's suicide, sleeping only once her husband and daughters have begun their day and revisiting not only confused memories of her past, but, in the dark hours of night, the geographical landmarks of those memories. Her attempt to locate the memories of trauma requires that she identify the physical spaces where they may have occurred, anchoring them to reality.

The uncertainty that permeates the novel is a manifestation of traumatic memory. Liam's death is not the only crisis that Veronica is faced with, but it is the trigger that initiates her examination of her understanding of her family dynamics and history. Cathy Caruth, in her text *Unclaimed Experience*, discusses trauma as "not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature - the way it was precisely *not known* in the first instance - returns to haunt the survivor later on" (4). The 'belated experience' of such trauma, as we can infer from Veronica's narrative, is a persistent element in her life whether she is aware of it or not. Throughout the text Veronica exhibits a hypersexual perspective of her world that demonstrates the recurring, unconscious influence those uncertain events at her grandmother's house have on her life, decades after they may have occurred. Her inability to reconcile early sexual experience as a power relationship warps her perception of sexuality and makes it a central focus of her interaction with the world, desire can only be expressed through sexual dominance, even if it is inappropriate.

The inaccessibility of Veronica's memory complicates her relationships, particularly with the men in her life. Paul Ricoeur posits that "*too much* memory here, *not enough* memory there - can be reinterpreted in terms of the categories of resistance and compulsion to repeat" (*Memory, History, Forgetting* 79) the events that lead to a traumatized condition. There is 'too much' memory of the abuse so that Veronica unconsciously seeks to repeat the imbalance of power

inherent in the relationship between abuser and victim, perhaps in an unrecognized desire to satisfy her own guilt for being a victim herself, or for being a silent witness to her brother's abuse. As she frames it however, "I am attracted to people who suffer, or me who suffer, my suffering husband, my suffering brother, the suffering figure of Mr. Nugent" (Enright 129), she is attracted to the perception of dysfunction because she does not know how to properly connect with the emotions of happiness and desire. There is 'not enough' access to the memory of abuse however, and this gives her license to not only invent the narratives about her grandparents, but also to appropriate memories of events that happen to her siblings.

One of the reason's that these 'uncertain events' become such powerful forces in the text is because Veronica is unable to distinguish if she was victim or witness, or both, or if they occurred at all. Veronica needs to locate a source of her brother's desire to die as well as the source of her own disconnection to the trappings of success she has pursued as an adult. It is not just the event of sexual abuse by Nugent, but almost all of her memories are uncertainties. Veronica is unmoored by the uncertainties of her memories, no longer finding satisfaction in the identity she has crafted. She acknowledges this lack, "I don't know the truth, or I don't know how to tell the truth. All I have are stories, night thoughts, the sudden conviction that uncertainty spawns" (Enright 2). Carol Dell'Amico connects this amorphous sense of trauma and absence with "the problem of certain groups' invisibility within the discipline of Irish national imagining" ("Anne Enright" 63), that Veronica's inability to properly convey the story of her and Liam's abuse is a reflection of the national silence that envelops stories of such violence. In the nationalist imagery, there is no place for perpetrators of victims of sexual abuse, and by default their victims so they are ignored in favor of the romanticized version of happy Irish families and Catholic morality.

Veronica has not simply forgotten about the events at her grandmother's house. The gaps in her memory prevent her from identifying, and acknowledging the events that occurred. In his text, *Memory, Trauma and History*, Michael Roth locates the difficulty of traumatic history “not as the past event [that] has been forgotten - many events are forgotten - but that the event has not been left behind successfully. It continues to affect the present” (80). The trauma of abuse that Veronica is trying to come to terms with, and the national experiences of abuse that Dell’Amico refers to, are not simply traumatic history, they continue to influence the present, and how victims relate to the world around them. As with Veronica’s experience, the imperative of “don’t tell Mammy” functions not only to lessen the concerns of a woman with twelve children and insufficient resources to protect them, but in terms of a national experience, ‘don’t tell’ is the powerful control of abuser over victim, often privileged by their role in the community or the family. The vulnerability of mothers created by the state’s dismissal of their presence outside the home places them in a position where they are unable to protect themselves or their children. Nugent’s position as Ada’s landlord places him in a position of power because if she were ever to report, or even acknowledge the abuse, he could manipulate her vulnerability by evicting her, or exploiting her financially.

In her confrontation of the past the narrative that Veronica creates for her grandparents, Ada and Charlie Spillane, and Lambert Nugent is romanticized, but there is a persistent, private violence in the relationship between Ada and Nugent that fetishizes Veronica’s memory of her grandmother and Nugent. While potentially a creation of her own attempt to understand the conditions that led to the experience of trauma, it is also her attempt to locate responsibility for the abuse she believes occurred in her childhood. The notion that a reason must be present to give meaning to her (and Liam’s) experiences is necessary in order for her to assign blame.

Regardless of the truthfulness of Nugent's role in the sexual abuse Veronica believes she and her brother experienced, her memory casts Nugent in a predatory role.

Veronica creates narratives of her family in the hours while the rest of the world sleeps. The memories that she chooses to elaborate on are overwhelmingly focused on the sexuality that has resulted in the creation of her life; the odd triangle of Ada, Charlie, and Nugent, the essentially reproductive marriage of her parents, and her own apparently superficial marriage to Tom. The connections that she makes between memories, and the inherited traits of family, become the scaffold upon which she has constructed her sense of place in the world. Veronica's experience with trauma has never been directly addressed and so the subtle undertones of violent sexuality (anticipated or demonstrated) persists because she is unable to confront the potential reality of the abuse. Veronica tells us that "in those days [Ada's generation], people used to mixed up together in the most disgusting ways" (Enright 35). Even though she is talking about Nugent's incestuous desire for his sister, and attempting to distance herself from the 'disgusting' thoughts that drive his abusive behavior, she is also referencing her own internalization of sexual abuse. Her own relationship with sex and the body is connected to issues of corruption of desire and violence.

Throughout the novel, Veronica's expectation of sexual relationships are predicated on her experience that men will take advantage of the proximity of perceived available bodies, sexuality and romance are not connected, only an animal drive to be satisfied. Sex is equated with violence, and is highly territorial. In his article, "Mourning Remains Unresolved: Trauma and Survival in Anne Enright's *The Gathering*", Liam Harte argues that Veronica's traumatic experience with abuse as a child, which breaks to the surface after her brother's death, is so overwhelming that she finds the physical evidence of sex to be "revolting" (196). This revulsion

manifests in different ways. Towards her own parents, particularly her mother, Veronica finds she cannot “forgive her any of it” (Enright 7) because of the lack of control over their sexuality. Towards her husband she is alternatively cold and rejects his attempts at sexual intimacy, or aggressive and manipulative, accusing him of harboring sexual thoughts about other women and children. While sexual abuse is certainly traumatic, Veronica identifies the failure of her mother to protect her from the abuse, and her uncontrolled sexual relationship as equally responsible for the circumstances of Liam’s death and all of the associated issues Veronica perceives.

Enright’s portrayal of Veronica’s preoccupation with sexuality is a deliberate choice, “that sense that someone - usually a man - is enraged by the fact that he desires someone - usually a woman” (qtd. in Gardam 6). This rage that Enright has tried to examine is personified through Nugent, in Veronica’s narrative about the day Nugent and Ada meet in the hotel lobby,

there were phases and stages to his attachment (he hated her, after all, before a quarter past seven), each of which he must re-enact in longer cycles - years long, or decades - he must move from love to a kind of sneering, he must be smitten by hatred and be touched by desire, he must find a final humility and so begin with love again (Enright 18).

His unsatisfied desire for her becomes the nexus of their relationship in Veronica’s narrative, and eventually, the reason why Nugent abuses Ada’s grandchildren, “when Nugent saw a child he saw revenge - I have no doubt about that - and a way out of it all; the whole tedious business of human exchange that a man has to go through in order to get what he might want” (Enright 236). Denied the satisfaction of the relationship with Ada he desires, he punishes her through his abuse of the children, whether she knows of it or not. They have inherited his unsatiated rage towards Ada, as they have the color of her eyes or the shape of her feet. Revenge is an intimate

manifestation of memory, revenge is nurtured and executed with the expectation that the target, as well as the seeker of revenge remember why it is happening, and understand the framing narrative of circumstances leading up to its expression.

Veronica's preoccupation with sex is manifested as well through her frequent reference to the inherited traits of the family; the blue eyes, the family nose, Ada's long legs and large feet. She is concerned with the traits that her own daughters have received from her and Tom, and how best to protect their happiness, but through this desire, what she is ultimately looking for, is to deny that she has inherited the failings of her own mother, namely that she is not relevant to her family. Veronica's identity is defined through her connections, Liam is her opposite, where she seeks stability and the status quo, his life is best defined as nomadic. Their proximity in age contributes greatly to her assertion that "I am the one that loved him most" (Enright 11). She has, according to her narrative, been forced into being responsible for getting Liam's body home from England and for informing their mother of his death because she is the one who has made the right decisions.

She is distinctly not her siblings, and although she identifies physical traits that she shares with them, she does not share any personality traits, as though to do so would mean that she has failed to escape from their dysfunction. She has chosen to align her sense of self to the consumerist, modern conception of success with a well-appointed home and a nice car, and a husband that is successful enough to allow her to be a stay at home mother, the modern incarnation of the ideal Irish mother. Instead of the overburdened, and almost constantly pregnant stereotype that her mother represents, Veronica desperately tries to remain relevant in her daughters' lives. As a representation of a contemporary Ireland trying to locate the essence

of Irishness in the twenty-first century, Veronica has embraced the identity and goals of Celtic Tiger Ireland.

The relative ease by which this identity of success can be achieved is the attraction for Veronica. Michael Roth makes the argument that communities, “having lost its own orientation because part of its history is inaccessible, the group mimics or appropriates the behavior of more successful, ‘healthier’ groups” (*Memory, Trauma, and History* 80), this can be translated to the individual level with Veronica. She has been unable to locate an authentic connection with her personal past, and therefore has difficulty structuring her identity independently; her lifestyle is dependent on what is socially defined as success. Although several of her siblings also seem to have reached equal levels of conventional success, she holds herself above them because she feels she has made all the right choices, she is “the careful one” (Enright 10). Her indignation towards her siblings, “I am in a rage with every single one of my brothers and sisters, including Stevie, long dead, and Midge, recently dead, and I am boiling mad with Liam for being dead too, just now, when I need him most” (Enright 10) is also mixed with her desire to find the support and love that seems to have escaped her during their growing up years.

Through Liam’s death she is forced to confront the feeling that had her mother had fewer children, perhaps they would have been protected from Nugent’s abuse; after all, it is because of her mother’s inability to care for all of the children that they are sent to live with Ada in the first place. Veronica spends much of the novel remembering events that may or may not have happened, attempting to structure a narrative that explains to herself, as much as to the reader, what it is that she cannot locate within those memories. She becomes nomadic, not geographically, like Liam, but chronologically. She wavers through periods of the past, confusing them and disordering them to try and find the connections that will identify what it is

she is missing. Enright's determined focus on desire and the disruption of that desire through rage and hatred is embodied by Veronica's repeated declaration that she cannot forgive any of them for all the unfairness she has suffered. She is unable to access memories of the abuse, and so she is unable to work through and forget the trauma. Without the ability to move on, there is no capacity for forgiveness. She needs to bear witness to her uncertain memories, as Dori Laub describes,

This imperative to tell and be heard can be itself an all-consuming life task. Yet no amount of telling seems ever to do justice to this inner compulsion. There are never enough words or the right words, there is never enough time or the right time, and never enough listened or the right listening to articulate the story that cannot be fully captured in thought, memory, and speech ("Truth and Testimony" 63).

Veronica writes and rewrites her narratives about Ada and Nugent, and what she thinks happened at Ada's house while her family is sleeping, but she cannot speak about these memories with anyone. It is only at the very end of the novel that she even considers doing so. The childhood commandment, "don't tell Mammy", continues to be the ultimate rule, no matter how old, or what the news, she cannot say that she believes that she and Liam were abused, the telling is still inadequate.

Chapter 2: Forgiveness and Forgetfulness

The Secret Scripture: Survival, Identity, and Forgiveness

In *The Secret Scripture*, Roseanne McNulty lives through several traumatic experiences, some she reveals herself, and some are revealed through the gaps in her memory that are supplemented through the testimony of others. Her desire to convey her story is directly connected to her awareness of her own mortality, but is not frightened of that mortality, though that is what we expect. Roseanne is caught in the crisis faced by many trauma narratives, “the oscillation between a *crisis of death* and a correlative *crisis of life*: between the story of the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival” (Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* 7). What this means for *The Secret Scripture*, is that it is not simply the events of Roseanne’s past that have been traumatic, but her survival of them is in itself traumatic. Her identification as an Other in the community leaves her vulnerable to repeated victimization, but from this Other status she derives a sense of strength and commitment to life.

Roseanne’s inability to speak the words she records on her stash of pilfered writing paper is a reflection of her continued fear of being punished for not conforming to the role she is expected to fulfill. In her experience she is denied the opportunity to defend her position, and she would be expected to remain quietly behind the doors of the institution where she was deposited. Her challenge of the society that put her in the institution, even at such a late point in her life, demands recognition of her presence, even if she cannot account for her whole past. There are gaps in Roseanne’s narrative, but the events she does remember are just as jarring to read as what Fr. Gaunt’s testimony suggests occupies those gaps. From the first confrontation with the Lavalley brothers, to her delivery of her child alone on the beach, Roseanne has survived some extreme events that have brought her to the very edge of death, but those events are not lost to

her, even if they are not completely reliable in her portrayal or the sequence of their occurrence in her narrative. In the past her voice was silenced by others, but in the present, she chooses to remain silent because of the continued influence those others have on her life. *The Secret Scripture* is analogous to the difficult relationship between the developing Republic and its marginalized citizens and Roseanne's trauma is not just her own, but shared by her father and her mother.

After her father's death, Roseanne is left with a mother who is barely present, unable to provide care or protection to her daughter. She was a woman "singularly without stories" (Barry 11), a description more accurate in more ways than one. Not only does she not share any stories of her past with her daughter, but she disappears from her life completely after being committed, "I am looking for my mother in these memories, and I cannot find her. She has simply disappeared" (Barry 148), a fate that Roseanne will eventually fall victim to herself. Maternal silence in this text, like *The Gathering* and *Reading in the Dark*, signals the absence of a connection to the past and protection from the potential of harm. Roseanne's mother-in-law is silent as well towards her, direct communication is only ever noted twice, first at their introduction meeting and then later when Roseanne begs for help during her labor. Mrs. McNulty speaks through her sons and through Fr. Gaunt. They are barriers by which Mrs. McNulty is protected from Roseanne and her Otherness, but those men are also instruments of trauma for Roseanne. Mrs. McNulty could have sheltered Roseanne if she had not been vulnerable herself to rumors of infidelity.

Though these women should be characters that protect Roseanne, each abandon her in her time of most urgent need. Roseanne reflects vividly, "how I wished suddenly for my own mother to seek me so fiercely, so sweatingly, to find me again on the lost strand of the world, to rescue

me” (Barry 131). She is orphaned by the absence of her mother, and when she turns to the only other mother figure she knows, Mrs. McNulty, she is turned away, a threat to Mrs. McNulty’s own reputation. Instead of finding a shared connection with Roseanne, Mrs. McNulty must distance herself in order to benefit from the protection offered by her reputation as a good Catholic woman. Repeatedly in the text it is alluded to that there were similar issues of fidelity whispered about Mrs. McNulty, “vicissitudes” as Roseanne and Jack McNulty call them (Barry 209, 258) and the repetition of such rumors would damage the carefully crafted image that she has cultivated. Roseanne desperately needs to find protection from a culture where her choices and social status make her vulnerable, but when she is abandoned by the two women she had any connection to, she finds herself repeating both women’s experiences. She gives birth to a child whose father is not her husband, like her mother-in-law, but does not have the protection of a marriage to hide within. And the illness of her own mother contributes to Roseanne’s vulnerability, as it is less difficult to construct an argument that Roseanne herself is unstable and should be ‘protected’ by being committed.

As these women negotiate their community, it is too much of a liability, particularly for Mrs. McNulty to risk aiding Roseanne who becomes the very image of womanhood that the country wants to hide away. Roseanne becomes a silent mother herself when her child is taken away from her. Though we come to discover that Dr. Grene is her lost child, she does not, and her reluctance to speak to him about the circumstances surrounding her commitment and his birth is not only her fear of questioning her memory of the past, but also his ability to judge her in the event that her story is not as accurate as it could be. The trauma of this silence, and Dr. Grene’s (and thus the modern community) difficulty in forming judgment about the justness of Roseanne’s situation is, as Michael Roth describes it, “an unfinished relationship with the past”

and that “one can never comprehend what happened at the time in that place” (“Trauma” 82). Barry uses silence here to illustrate how the loss of stories like Roseanne’s means that understanding the conditions of the past can never take place. By identifying, and providing the opportunity for women like her to be acknowledged, Barry creates a space for interrogation of the past that was previously unavailable. It is no longer an idealized past, but it is more representative of reality.

Roseanne has forgotten by choice, or due to her age, or because of legitimate trauma, certain aspects of her life that are the focus of Dr. Grene’s interest and so she is unable to access those moments even if other records seem to document them. For Dr. Grene, and for others attempting to uncover the ‘truth’ of historical experience in Ireland, those moments will always be obscured because there are multiple perspectives for the same moment. This multiplicity of experience is counter to the desire of nationalism to create one unified version of experience. The assertion that Roseanne’s perspective is as valid as Fr. Gaunt’s testimony not only elevates her historical relevance within the community, but forces that community to acknowledge its own complacency in the denial of her story. What Barry has shown is that while multiple perspectives of the past exist, there is no one definitive version of events, those perspectives must be taken together to construct an accurate representation of history.

The relationships between those perspectives will, as it has done in *The Secret Scripture*, depend largely on the status of those reporting the events. Until Roseanne begins to question her grasp on the past, we do not question her relation of it; even after the instinct is to give her the benefit of belief because after all, she is quite old. When Fr. Gaunt’s testimony is initially relayed however his appearance of authority subverts Roseanne’s testimony. It is not until Dr. Grene comments about his misgivings about the priest’s intentions that sympathy for Roseanne

is truly developed. In an interview, Paul Ricoeur acknowledges this very problem, “there is therefore a presupposition of credibility for the voice that bears witness. But this credibility itself can always be submitted to criticism ... In this sense, history truly begins only with the confrontation with and between testimonies” (qtd. in Piatek 164). Barry seems to be acutely aware of this as his novel seeks to piece together the testimonies of Roseanne and Fr. Gaunt to construct one, representative story through which Dr. Grene can establish the truth of her history. For Barry, the truth can only be established through all testimonies working together, filling gaps and viewing an event from multiple vantage points.

The adoption of a singular narrative not only devalues marginalized experiences, but refocuses attention on perspectives that serve the agenda of the majority. Although the novel reflects the experiences of the nation, Barry’s approach “[moves] the discourse away from the struggle against the British, and focusing instead on the potentially destructive consequences of the nationalist myth - especially for future generations” (Hatipoglu 159). The issue of trauma is not based on what the English did to the Irish, but what the Irish did to themselves, and how those actions will reverberate through generations of people who have fallen under the easy spell of the nationalist identity. Dr. Grene, as a mediator between the competing representations of Roseanne’s life, is tasked with the determination of her sanity and the appropriateness of her continued residence in the mental hospital. But at her advanced age, the question must also be asked, does it matter? Again parallel to the current social discussion of these excluded narratives, the fact that these events took place in an Irish community that is so different from today means they might have just as easily taken place halfway across the world. Distance from events and victims makes it difficult for individuals to find value in their narratives, lack of connection creates a social conscience that is not engaged because it is ‘not me’. The demand for empathy

remains important whether focused on the past or present to guard against the continuation of victimization.

As time passes and the individuals who managed to survive their ordeals start to pass away the question is not so much how to repair the traumatic injury (of the individual as well as the community) as the time has clearly passed for that, but how contemporary Irish communities can learn from these personal histories; first silenced because to acknowledge them could tarnish the image of a culture built around purity and morality, then silenced again, later, because to acknowledge them would expose the Church and the government as abusers of their own people. As Ireland emerges into the twenty-first century with a strong economy, the influx of newly arrived immigrants means they are faced once again with communities of marginalized people, who will find themselves vulnerable to the majority natives.

With the evolution of the population in Ireland, the relationship between Irish and Other is an ongoing mediation of identity. In his text, *On Hospitality*, Jacques Derrida engages with the negotiation of a relationship between two individuals, or nations, through the gesture of hospitality. With regards to *The Secret Scripture*, there are two aspects that are of particular concern. The first is the “gesture by which one ... welcomes the other” (62), “without asking reciprocity” (25), in essence, without asking that the receiver assimilate to make the host more comfortable. The notion of hospitality is a complex one for Ireland as a nation because of the nature of their long colonial condition, but after independence, it is individuals like Roseanne who find themselves in a dysfunctional relationship with the ‘host’ community. As a postcolonial environment, Ireland’s self-perception is one that has excluded the Other, but must now acknowledge the falseness of the romanticized image of nationalist Ireland.

The second part of Derrida's discussion that is an important factor for *The Secret Scripture* is anticipation of the guest. He suggests that to provide unconditional hospitality one refrains from even asking a name of the person (29), that "a threshold must be crossed before hospitality is possible; hence, the figure of 'the outsider' is essential" (Shyrock 410). Offering or receiving gestures of hospitality are a negotiated act of power between host and guest, but the anticipation of reciprocity from either party unbalances the power relationship. Andrew Shyrock elaborates on this aspect in his article "Thinking about Hospitality". Though discussing Bedouin culture, the principle translates throughout cultures as the fundamental structure by which hospitality can be transmitted, "[its] emphasis on moral perfection, gained not by dominance but through modesty and sacrifice" (407) alludes to a process far more permissive to the 'guest' than the relationship that Roseanne and her family experience with Fr. Gaunt and their own country.

For Roseanne who is an outsider to the community despite her native birth, the loss of her father leaves her without protection. Already considered suspicious because of her father's alleged ties to the RIC (according to Fr. Gaunt) or conversely his ties to the anti-treaty fighters (according to Roseanne), her unstable English mother would have further compounded her Otherness. Her family's relationship with Fr. Gaunt appears to be the antithesis of absolute hospitality as defined by Derrida. Fr. Gaunt's 'benefactor' role to the Clear family is clearly an application of his power over them and his influence in the community. In return for his ability to clear the way for access to employment for Roseanne's father, and permission to marry for Roseanne, he expects both characters to conform to his expectations of behavior, and punishment usually follows their failure to comply. His request, "be advised by me ... it will save your immortal soul, and save you in this valley of sorrows and tears. It will protect you against all the foul tides and accidents of the world" (Barry 96) is not only an attempt to pull her under the

protection of the Catholic Church, but under Gaunt's direct control. Her refusal to let herself be directed by him elicits "a taint of animosity" (Barry 95) from him. He only wishes to provide help and support as long as he can be sure of her compliance.

Failure to assimilate into the dominant Catholic culture is the supreme danger for Roseanne, and what ultimately leads to her commitment to the mental hospital. Her mother-in-law, the original Mrs. McNulty, is held up as the ideal to which Roseanne should aspire. By becoming a Mrs. McNulty, Roseanne's behavior reflects on both women. The issue of naming referenced above is interesting here. Roseanne writes, "I was once also a Mrs. McNulty, but never as supremely as she. Never. As she made quite clear a hundred times. Furthermore, why did I give my name ever since as McNulty, when those great efforts were made by everybody to take the name away? I do not know" (Barry 28). Stripping Roseanne of her married name again exposes her to the dangers of the world without familial protection, but Roseanne continues to be referred to by this name throughout her life. Without family to advocate on her behalf she is at the mercy of the hospitals where she resides. At first, McNulty may have afforded her some benefit at Sligo Mental Hospital because her in-laws also worked there, but not for long. According to the novel, McNulty is a widely known name in the area, while Clear, her maiden name, is fairly unique. Simply by retaining a family name that alludes to her ownership of a place within the community would afford her even a modicum of compassion and protection.

The trauma that Roseanne experiences with the dissolution of her marriage is the one most closely related to Roseanne's sense of identity, and arguably the most significant of any of the events of her life. She will always be someone's daughter, and mother, as those are biological relationships that are independent of any cultural influence. But her identity as a wife, as Roseanne McNulty is hers only while her marriage is valid. She is a married woman but unwed.

Her name is Roseanne McNulty, but that is no longer a rightful title anymore. The difficulty of this indeterminate identity, the constant reopening of this wound, is exhausting for Roseanne, “I was then too weary to explain yet again, for the millionth time in sixty years and more, that I wasn’t Mrs. McNulty. That I wasn’t anybody, wasn’t anybody’s wife. I was just Roseanne Clear” (Barry 244). Of all the things that Roseanne has forgotten, this may be the one thing she wishes she could, but is unable to because the ‘official’ record lists her married name only.

Despite her decades as a patient at Roscommon and Sligo hospitals, and the years of isolation and neglect before that, the Roseanne that Barry creates is poetically resilient. She frequently takes the opportunity to not only find the beauty and peacefulness in the world around her, as she writes “it is always worth itemizing happiness, there is so much of the other thing in a life, you had better put up the markers for happiness while you can” (Barry 141), but she also offers understanding to the people who had been involved in the difficulties of her life. After reading her account of her life, Dr. Grene calls her “a surprising celebrator of life and people” (Barry 278). Even with regards to Fr. Gaunt, who is intimately involved in each traumatic event of her life, she feels anger towards him, but throughout her narrative there is a suggestion of forgiveness towards him, and the McNulty’s. Importantly, while Roseanne appears to have forgiven those who have harmed her, and though her memories have been distorted by age and trauma, she still remembers the elements of her experiences. It is important to remember here that, as Ricoeur says, “it would be a pitfall to confuse forgiveness with forgetting. On the contrary, we can forgive only where there is no forgetting, where the humble have been released from a promise” (“Reflections” 11). Roseanne has, through her narrative, given herself the opportunity to confront her memories and chooses to let go of the past. For Barry, to forget the past means that we have lost a connection to the events that influence our present, but to find

forgiveness for those who have inflicted hurt demonstrates the acceptance of a multi-narrative concept of history, as one's narrative is only a small part of the whole.

Roseanne's narrative is uncovered at the very end of her long life. The necessity of acknowledging the marginalized experiences of people like Roseanne decades after anything helpful can be done is conveyed by Dr. Grene, "why was I pursuing it? Well, the truth is, it has been a great comfort. Also, there has been something about it that I have found almost irresistible. I think I must classify the whole impulse as a form of grieving ... what would it serve now to dig it up?" (Barry 275). And should be thought of as a form of cultural grieving. To proponents of the Trauma Studies and Psychoanalytical theories in literature, there can be no resolution to trauma without a 'working through' of the event to locate and resolve the source, an activity that in Roseanne's case, would cause more harm than good, as her advanced age makes her delicate, vulnerable to emotional pain now instead of physical. The revelation that her son has been so near to her for so long is rife with the possibility of irreparable shock, which is the very reason by both Dr. Grene and John Kane conceal the information from her.

A narrative like Roseanne's is a minor challenge to the history of a nation. "The struggle for memory", according to Peter Ramadanovic, "is a political struggle. It is waged against the winners ... who control history, and, by manipulating the collective memory, dictate the collective's identity" (*Forgetting Futures* 24). In relation to *The Secret Scripture*, and Barry's own interests in reclaiming space in the historical narrative for characters like Roseanne, this 'struggle for memory' is important not just for this novel, but for the Ireland Barry writes in. The interest that Dr. Grene feels in Roseanne's story is important because revealing the presence of her narrative reclaims space in the collective identity for women like Roseanne. The image of a devout housewife, concerned with only home, hearth, and the spiritual wellbeing of her family

was never a majority identity shared by the whole of Irish women. That her motherhood was denied because of her child's illegitimacy shows just how influential the nationalist agenda was in the definition of Irish motherhood. To challenge that view not only empowers contemporary Irish women to unburden themselves of this ideal, but reinforces the opportunity to engage with an expanding narrative of Irish experience.

Reading in the Dark: Willful Forgetting and Events of Cultural Trauma

In an interview printed in *Fortnight*, Seamus Deane says “there is no talking cure, no implication that by revealing everything you will somehow overcome it” (Rumens 30). Contrary to the belief maintained by Trauma Studies and Psychoanalytical theorists, Deane's assertion, particularly in Northern Ireland, is that the Freudian concept of ‘working through’¹⁶ a trauma is unlikely to produce a positive outcome, particularly when it comes to the kinds of politically charged trauma experienced by the country and in his novel *Reading in the Dark*. The boundary between victim and perpetrator is not always clear, and often is erased completely as cycles of revenge are perpetuated. This perspective suggests, as is demonstrated in the novel, the only way to escape from the influence of some moments of trauma is to try and forget, or at the very least, try not to remember them. Today there is no consensus of how best to recognize the past when it comes to historical representation with how victims of violence, on both sides of the partisan divide, are expected to move on from tragic, or traumatic experiences¹⁷.

¹⁶ According to the theoretical foundations of Psychoanalysis and, under the influence of Psychoanalysis, Trauma Studies, the process of ‘working through’ a trauma requires that an individual confront the memory of said trauma, in an effort to cease the repetition of its influence on their life/psyche. For many critics, like Cathy Caruth, this process of ‘working through’ is a requirement in the productive movement towards healing from the traumatic experience.

¹⁷ “Reconciliation encompasses different challenges, such as the notion of truth, mercy and justice. And seeking truth about the past can generate tensions. In the case of Northern Ireland, the narrative can be

In *Reading in the Dark*, Deane structures the primary crisis as the knowledge of the true fate of the narrator's two uncles, Eddie and Tony McIlhenny. The revelation of this information has the potential not only to destroy his parent's marriage, but the relationship between his mother and aunt, Katie as well. The narrator's compulsion to learn everything can be seen as a reflection of his attempt to 'work through' the trauma of his family history. He explores every fragment of memory that his uncles, father, and grandfather share about the disappearance of his uncle Eddie. His information is also gathered from Crazy Joe and Sergeant Burke through suggestive snippets of conversation and storytelling. The amalgamation that develops creates an awareness by the narrator that his efforts to discover the origin of his family's trauma has not repaired the damage it has created, but rather his knowledge of these secrets will only contribute to the dysfunction of his family.

The continuation of traumatic experience, as the narrator's family seems to experience, is reflective of the lengthy demonstration of Ireland's (north and south) traumatic history. In her book, *Haunting Legacies: Violent Histories and Transgenerational Trauma*, Gabrielle Schwab discusses exactly this:

There is no life without trauma. There is not history without trauma. Some lives will forever be overshadowed by violent histories, including colonial invasions, slavery, totalitarianism, dictatorships, wars, and genocide ... Some lives are hit with catastrophic trauma over and over again; then trauma, with its concomitant strategies of survival, becomes a chronic condition. Defense and denial become second nature; traumatic repetition becomes second nature. Trauma as a mode of

different (or perceived as such), depending upon the community affected. A reconciliation process has to address controversial and sensitive issues that would not be seen as such in other more settled societies. For example, the notion of victim and perpetrator is more challenging, since a perpetrator can — in the context of a deeply divided society — also be a victim" ("Reconciliation").

being violently halts the flow of time, fractures the self, and punctures memory and language ... Yet in these stories, trauma is often curiously contained. Words seal over violent ruptures and wounds. Voice has settled into quiet detachment. Occasionally, a few tears emerge, like traces leading away from an old wound. Mostly, however, the stories have grown over the open wound like a second skin (42).

The Irish, like the narrator's family, have internalized the historical experience of trauma. The twentieth century in particular is marked by an apparent inability to move out of this repetitive cycle. In relation to *Reading in the Dark*, Schwab's observation of the influence of traumatic history is demonstrated by the way stories are used by the characters to convey such history. For instance, the story Crazy Joe tells about Larry McLaughlin and his encounter with the devil is used to explain why this man behaves the way that he does. The truth of Larry's experience, which the narrator will eventually hypothesize as the execution of his uncle Eddie, is relevant to the community because of Larry's continued experience of trauma. Larry did indeed encounter evil and was left traumatized by the event, but it was Eddie's murder not the Devil that affected Larry so powerfully. He is prevented from communicating the real source of dysfunction because there is still risk associated with revealing his participation in the murder.

Deane suggests that trauma is transmitted through generations. He includes several references to stories about 'haunted' families. The two McLaughlin's, the Grenaghan/Bredin/Falkner love triangle, even Sergeant Burke and his sons, they all have a violent and traumatic domestic history that inevitably interacts with the community and so, while their stories need to be included in the wider narrative of the community, to speak directly about them reengages with the original trauma. By recasting the stories as myth, the community is able

to communicate the meaning of the story while leaving room to forget the trauma. These stories are based on real experiences, but the supernatural elements create a safe distance between the events and the community. After retelling the story of how the Grenaghan family came to be haunted, Liam makes the argument, “they should be allowed to die out. That was the only way to appease a ghost. Even if they didn’t marry, those that remained would always the presence in their houses. They should emigrate. The boys should become monks, the girls nuns. Anything to stop the revenge. Anything” (Deane 172). The shadow cast by these stories, for the narrator and the country, is an influence that is transmitted through the generations. As the distance between the original event and the present grows, the influence of the past dissipates into myth.

Deane’s suggestion that revenge can be stopped by eliminating the transmission of trauma through future generation offers two perspectives. The first, as discussed in Cathy Caruth’s *Literature in the Ashes of History*, is the erasure of both the witness and through this lack of witness, the erasure of the memory of a particular history (81-2). Memory, like history, is not immediately accessible and must be constructed after an event. If there is no alternative witness to an event to contradict the accepted historical narrative, as in the case Eddie’s potential innocence, then the dominant narrative, that the narrator’s father has accepted and internalized, is the only possible narrative. There is no crisis for the family to endure except the reputation of a dead man, which might be overcome in time. If the narrator and his mother cannot serve as ‘witnesses’ to Eddie’s innocence, then there is no narrative memory of its truth. Their knowledge of the circumstances resulting in Eddie’s death however create a crisis between them because they share a reality that cannot be communicated to anyone else. His mother’s attempt to protect the family by demanding silence disturbs the ability of this trauma to fade away.

The alternative viewpoint, shared by Dori Laub and Neal Alexander, is that “the ‘not telling’ of the story serves as perpetuation of its tyranny” (Laub 64). The idea that ‘remembering ... is the first step to working through, and eventually forgetting, the long term effects of trauma, whether at an individual or collective level’” (Alexander 281) challenges the impetus to forget that Deane advocates for in the novel. From this perspective, it is only through the acknowledgement of the trauma, the circumstances of Eddie’s death, that the trauma can be resolved, letting the “past be the past” (Deane 42) once and for all. The domesticity of the narrators particular traumatic dysfunction, where to betray his mother would be to destroy the family but the betrayal of his father also damages his personal relationships with his parents stands as an analogy for the way in which efforts of reconciliation in the country has the potential for triggering a new cycle of violence. A choice must be made for mercy or for justice, but they mutually exclusive.

Throughout the novel, the narrator is confronted with the implications of his potential decisions regarding the secrets he protects. The navigation of how to proceed seems to escape the narrator, he is left exposed to the perception of the community, and even his own father, because he is unable to reveal the truth about the extent of his knowledge. His brother Liam, who has not been bestowed with the same burden of information, understands the mechanism of perception much more clearly within the community and helps his brother to regain acceptance by manipulating the Bishop and Sergeant Burke. It appears that Deane has constructed a dynamic where the truth of the past can be known, but impedes the integration into the present community, or, the accepted version of events can be accepted, and successful understanding of the community is available, but not both together. This binary relationship is accentuated in the novel in several situations where the narrator should have ‘known better’ (the incident with the

gun, taking Irene to the movies, etc.) because of conditioning to his social reality, but yet still responds inappropriately.

This disparity in the access to knowledge emphasizes how the narrative representation of the past can change drastically between perspectives. When the narrator's father reveals the 'truth' about Eddie during their visit to the little church, the narrator comes to understand that he is in a position that actually puts him at a disadvantage, "for once I knew more than he [Liam] did. Than either of them did. It was like being father to them both, knowing more" (Deane 139). His premonition of this, that "he [father] was going to tell me something terrible some day, and, in sudden fright, didn't want him to" (Deane 45) shows how troubled he finds himself with this information. Throughout the scene in the church, and generally throughout the novel, the narrator finds himself in conflict over his desire to learn everything about the family secret, yet the instinctual awareness that the revelation of those secrets would be dangerous, "it couldn't be over until he told me everything" (Deane 141). Until his father reveals all he knows, the conflict between knowing and not knowing is out of his control. He can chose not to seek more information, but his father imparts his version of events without invitation from the narrator. Once the father has unburdened himself, there can be no further unanticipated revelations.

The shame his father feels as he delivers this information to his sons is part of a lesson that the narrator must learn about carrying such a burden himself. His father has lived with this story for twenty years and has had to navigate the community under its weight, his sons must know how to do the same in order to protect them from falling victim to it. As far as his father knows, the story about Eddie's death is true, and although it is fact that Eddie was murdered on the feud farm in 1921, the larger narrative of Eddie's death escapes him. The real moment of family crisis is when they arrive home after their visit to the church, "when we came into the

kitchen, my mother looked up and the whole history of his family and her family and ourselves passes over her face in one intuitive waltz of welcome and then of pain” (Deane 141). Shame is arguably more destructive to the narrator's mother, as she is haunted not only by the knowledge of Eddie and McIlhenny's fates, but by the understanding of what revealing the truth would mean for her family now.

Both the mother and the father try to control the sources of information that the narrator and his siblings have access to. While stories are told by Katie, the narrator feels that his parents were “a kind of censorship” (Deane 62) curtailing Katie's ability to tell, but there is no indication that what she would share could have been anything dangerous but there is also a prohibition from the mother against the belief in folklore and stories in general. The novel opens with a conversation between the narrator and his mother,

There's something there between us. A shadow. Don't move.

I had no intention. I was enthralled. But I could see no shadow.

There's somebody there. Somebody unhappy...

I stood there, looking up at her. I loved her then. She was small and anxious, but without real fear.

I am sure I could walk up there to you, in two skips.

No, no. God knows. It's bad enough me feeling it; I don't want you to as well.

I don't mind feeling it. It's a bit like the smell of damp clothes, isn't it?

She laughed, No, nothing like that. Don't talk yourself into believing it. Just go downstairs. (Deane 3-4)

Both the mother and father carry the burden of Eddie and McIlhenny's stories, and the potential for something to slip through to their children must be carefully controlled in order to protect

them. The narrator is similarly warned off Crazy Joe, “stay away from Joe; he’s sick in the head ... he was not normal” (Deane 232). His mother warns him off Joe because she knows that it is likely that their shared secrets will be leaked, if they haven’t been already. His father is disturbed by the potential reputation that the narrator could develop if he continues to associate with Joe; he is already under the shadow of Eddie’s image as an informer, he doesn’t need to add insanity to the mix.

As the novel progresses, the primary result of the narrator’s reconstruction of his family’s past is that an overwhelming silence comes over his relationship with both parents. The reality of obtaining the truth about Eddie’s murder requires a larger sacrifice than the narrator initially expected, particularly after his mother’s breakdown. During her illness she stops speaking and only cries, overwhelmed by grief and shame, for months on end. Later, after she begins to recover, she begins to speak again but with a “new” voice that is “clear and young” (Deane 149) but is reserved only for those she knows have not been included in her husband’s revelations about Eddie. The narrator observes that she speaks in “connected remarks separated by days, weeks, months, but always in her new voice. I knew she was getting stranger; she was telling herself a story that only appeared now and then in her speech ... she had been in love with someone else, not quite my father. That’s what she was telling, and not telling him. And she was telling me” (Deane 150-1). By this time the narrator has learned how to interpret the silent or encoded statements she makes and add to his reconstruction of the family past.

Silence, in a narrative about storytelling, is as powerful as the ability to speak. Silence in this novel is used as a method of control over the narrator, and through him, the truth. After her recovery from her breakdown, the narrator’s mother is selectively silent, leaving him out of her conversations and punishing him for his access to her secrets. Deane constructs a relationship

where speech is indirect, because to speak plainly of their shared secret would expose them both to the temptation of revealing the truth. Her “low intensity warfare” (Deane 225) is a mystery to her husband, but the narrator understands how to interpret what she is saying, yet not saying. Her admonition against listening to her father, and believing in hauntings, are directives towards the narrator to keep silent as well. Her own silence about the reality of Eddie’s death is her attempt to obscure her own knowledge. If the narrator is tortured by his inability to tell his father the truth, the burden of guilt his mother feels must be even more intense. While silence in *The Secret Scripture* and *The Gathering* represent the failure of mothers to protect, Deane uses this mother’s determined silence as a relatively successful method of protecting the family.

Her request that the narrator “go away” so that she may be allowed to forget (Deane 235) is a request to allow other aspects of life distract her from the memory of the secrets she carries every day. In a way, this also explains her demands for perfection in exams. If she can make sure that he is focusing on his schoolwork, it is less likely that he is spending time dwelling on the information he has locked away. He also becomes less of a threat to her if he is thus occupied because the desire to inform his father might similarly be lessened. Daniel Ross suggests that “silence is a learned response in oppressed cultures, and trust is a precious and fragile commodity” (“Oedipus in Derry” 39). Silence for this family is a method of protection, and the betrayal of trust that results from the telling of stories could not only have consequences domestically, but in the community as well. Is it better to be the nephew of an informer, or the grandson of a murderer? That the narrator does not reveal what he has uncovered shows that Deane views the reputation of an informer to be the preferable identity. Revealing his grandfather’s role in Eddie’s murder would be a continuation of trauma, whereas Eddie’s

reputation has already been accepted, and though shameful, will not cause additional pain to the family.

The loss of the mother's power to speak after her stroke is seen by him as a mercy: "I would look at her, sealed in her silence, and now she would smile slightly at me and very gently, almost imperceptibly, shake her head. I was to seal it all in too. Now we could love each other, at last, I imagined" (Deane 242). The stroke has finally protected his mother from the desire to tell what she knows, perhaps because she no longer remembers, but also because she no longer has the physical ability to voice the words that would give away the secrets she has long carried. The anxiety that the narrator feels also lessens as she no longer appears to be burdened by what she knows.

That the novel ends with the resurgence of the sectarian violence of the Troubles is an intriguing ending when considered through the perspective of how trauma influences communities. While his parent's marriage has been sheltered by maintaining the secret of Eddie's death, the larger community has devolved into an escalating cycle of brutality predicated on reactionary violence. As discussed previously, the pathways taken in the hopes of moving past trauma, either personally or nationally, is a delicate path to take regardless of the choice. In Northern Ireland, the resurgence of violence is instigated, once again, by the perceptions of one part of the community regarding another, with old scores unsettled, and old resentments suddenly flaring (Bartlett 510-14). The transmission of the traumatic past, repeated through new generations, but who lack the first hand understanding of the original event devolves a tenuous peace to a new cycle of violence that in turn will engender its own traumatic legacy. For the narrator and his parents, their silence in the midst of a warzone is a hard won attempt to relegate

the past to the past. The decision not to witness is a decision against perpetuating the transmission of trauma to a new generation.

The Gathering: Growth through Tragedy

The prominence of physical absence in *The Gathering* is manifested in several ways. There are gaps left in the narrative, the dead children, the Hegarty side of the family, where their influence cannot be measured. But there are also characters that are there-but-not-there, like Charlie, Liam, and Veronica's mother who are more visible because of their absence from their relationships with other characters. Distance in these cases accentuate the potential for dysfunction, as the gap becomes the location of trauma. Although this novel, unlike *The Secret Scripture* and *Reading in the Dark*, does not overtly engage with the political or social environment that shape the narrative, it is still possible to read Veronica's story as a reflection of contemporary Ireland. In his book, *The Irish Writer and the World*, Declan Kiberd discusses the cultural implications of the Celtic Tiger environment that provides the setting for Veronica's revelations as well as informs her determination of what aspects of her identity should be most important. He suggests that "many writers find it hard to believe sufficiently in the shiny surfaces of Celtic Tiger Dublin" (276) and for Veronica this reliance on the hopeful potential of modernity can only mask the dysfunction in her life for so long. Her reliance on this prepackaged identity of success, as discussed previously, allows her to ignore the potential reasons she has been unable to develop her personal sense of identity.

As she struggles to document her past, Veronica tries to inhabit the ideals of newly consumerist Ireland to construct her sense of self, yet she finds it difficult to let go of the residual discomfort of her family's stereotypical representation and how that has influenced her. Veronica

straddles her two families, the stereotyped image of blessed fecundity, a mother's life devoted to the production of children, and the modern incarnation of a successful family, where the mother protects and nurtures her children and is not just a vessel for their introduction to the world. Enright creates the tension between the past and the present by making Veronica's narrative engage with the difficulty that Celtic Tiger Ireland has itself been faced with, namely, constructing an identity that not only embraces the reality of modernity, but that can also incorporate the reality of traumatic history so that it is not continually haunted by it.

In her narrative, absences tend to overlap with instances where Veronica seems to associate the gap with the traditional perception of Irishness. Beginning with her mother, who is described as "forgetfulness itself" (Enright 3), Veronica ties her mother's insubstantial presence to her functional motherhood, "my mother had twelve children - and as she told me one hard day - seven miscarriages. The holes in her head are not her fault" (Enright 7). Despite her conceptual understanding of her mother's inability to be firmly present, Veronica's judgment of her mother is founded upon her continued feeling that her mother has not, beyond giving birth to this family, satisfied the demands of motherhood, instead delegating those responsibilities to others. To Heidi Hansson, Enright uses this ambivalence towards the family to compromise Veronica's construction of identity. Hansson, again referencing the condition of the nation, writes "the search for identity can usually be satisfied through information about genetic - and by extension ethnic - background and identification with the nation" ("Postnationalism" 218), but instead of satisfying her desire for a stable identity through her genetic connection to the Hagerty family, Veronica only finds herself frustrated and antagonistic towards them.

The quality of forgetfulness, which cannot be forgiven by Veronica, is emblematic of the trauma that she and Liam experience after being abused. It is not only the fact that her mother's

inability to care for them as children placed them in the position of being victims, but that there was no opportunity for the abuse to have been acknowledged. As Veronica's revelations of the abuse start to come together, she also comes to suggest that although she can never know it, her mother was "rendered stupid by him [Nugent]" (Enright 224), making her silence and her absenteeism as a mother even more traumatic. Her mother's reaction to Veronica's is one of the only times that her mother is described with any substance, "'we always called him the landlord,' she says. And she gives me a most direct look" (Enright 213). In the space where Veronica could ask about the potentiality of abuse, she does not, but the direct look from her mother is almost an anticipation of some kind of revelation.

The inheritance of abuse, "the transgenerational transmission of psychic damage that makes future generations vulnerable to repetition and opens history to new cycles of violence" (Schwab 99), creates a legacy of damage that Veronica sees everywhere in her mother's bevy of children. Their mother's unavailability turns the older children into disciplinarians, "she left the hitting to other people" (Enright 8), each taking a turn in their own characteristic way. Veronica's perception of her damaged siblings is as unreliable as her grasp on the memory of Nugent's abuse however. Her representation of them as adults comes only through the interaction she has at Liam's wake. As a victim herself, Veronica's mother should have taken action to protect her children from Nugent, or to have been more resilient, thus removing the need to deposit her children at Ada's. This silent permissiveness, the forgetting of her own trauma leads directly to her children's victimization.

This absence is something that Veronica actively strives against in her relationships with her own daughters, finding herself caught up by the need to "keep [them] happy" (Enright 69). Her desire to speak the truth about the abuse is continually frustrated by her inability to disrupt

the happy continuity of her daughter's lives, or break the commandment, "don't tell Mammy". She instead pours her words out in her writing, while the world is asleep and the words she produces cannot be questioned except by herself. Despite her experience as a professional writer, Veronica is unable to properly write about her past, imaginary or not. When she encounters a gap, she invents narrative to satisfy the anxiety of not-knowing, and despite her unreliability as a narrator, she "is nevertheless utterly reliable in that she explores honestly the emotional truths of each stage of her growth in understanding" (Mills Harper 74). Though we may question the truth of the claims of abuse, the emotional trauma that Veronica reacts to is very real to her.

Anne Enright brings *The Gathering* to an end with Veronica's return trip from Gatwick airport, returning to Ireland and all the things she has run away from. The final thought, "I have been falling into my own life, for months. And I am about to hit it now" (Enright 261), is Veronica returning not only to the family she has left at home, but to the idea that she has confronted the reality of her past and is not capable of emerging from its influence. But the Veronica at the very end of the novel is not the same Veronica that had, up until the arrival at Gatwick, been narrating the story. Instead of a woman who views male sexuality and desire with suspicion, she has somehow adjusted her perception of Tom, telling us "I want to make love to my husband again. Because, for every time he wanted to undo me, there was love that put me back together" (Enright 260). Her confrontational attitude towards her husband that often seemed to suggest that she equated him with Nugent's predatory desires. Her lack of understanding when it comes to desire, and the resulting dysfunctional perversion, is something that Veronica fears. To her, all desire is sexual and potentially dangerous.

Her decision to reveal her 'uncertain' memories to her siblings (but not her mother) is a choice that will expose her to the questions and denials that she has, thus far, been able to avoid

by writing at night. Veronica's insistence that the abuse occurred is complicated by her inability to remember the event, as well as the fact that anyone who would have been able to corroborate her story is beyond questioning. The world has forgotten that the events have occurred, and so to remember them, and to ask for acknowledgement from others who did not witness risks the denial of Veronica's belief. Although Veronica narrates the text, and tells us that she writes down the stories she uses to work her way up to acknowledging the abuse, her dialog with other characters is superficial, and with the exception of Tom, avoids anything that could be confrontational. Actually voicing the stories that she has only ever put down on paper makes her testimony real, regardless of the truth. Her perception of the abuse is the only narrative now available, so there is no alternative memory to counter her claims.

In contrast to *The Secret Scripture* and *Reading in the Dark*, where the act of writing personal history is used as a mechanism to reclaim space within the larger historical narrative, *The Gathering* flips this experience. For Veronica, writing, especially as a woman, has been devalued because of her past experience with words, "wasti[ing] so much of my life writing about heated towel rails. Endless words" (Enright 71). Her attempts to attain the height of consumerist success transforms her into a hollow amalgamation of her vacant mother and a housewife who chooses to be so. Her relevance is found in speaking with her daughters, requiring that their interaction is uncontaminated by the written word, of what should be or could be, but what is. Veronica's need to bear witness to what may or may not be truth is driven by the need to be free of the constraints that she has so far encountered in writing her recollections down. Speaking of the abuse she and Liam experienced reinforces the physical experience and demands visibility, asserting the reality of memory she is uncertain of.

Veronica's chosen medium of expression is writing, but she does not want an audience. She is unprepared to share the thoughts that occupy her in the middle of the night because she is unsure of their purpose and meaning until she is able to get close enough to her absent memories to address their implications. Dominick LaCapra argues that "writing is a medium for expressing content, and its ideal goal is to be transparent to content or an open window on the past" (*Writing History, Writing Trauma* 3), but for Veronica, transparency is counterproductive as she does not want to encounter an interrogation of her story. In Veronica's case, the memories that have been mythologized are her own, and while they are unreliable reflections of the past, she is also the one who has felt most compelled to revise them. Because she is unable to remember, she is prevented from forgetting the event that have left her traumatized and is instead repeats the narrative that she has created in order to fill the gaps for herself. That she chooses Ernest, the lapsed priest, as her 'confessor', and to have him disseminate the story to the rest of the family after it is too late to reinforces her position of witness, if not to her own abuse, then at least to Liam's.

Throughout the text Veronica states that she cannot forgive her family for various things, but the essential nature of their transgression is that they do not reflect the expectations that she has for them, and how she feels they should respond to certain situations. She is "in a rage with every single one of my brothers and sisters" (Enright 10) because they have left her to handle the details of Liam's return, but she also claims to have "loved him the most" (Enright 11). Her indignation is less focused on their lack of involvement, than it is that they assume that she should be the one to take care of everything because she has the resources to do so. Kitty, who she mentions is also involved in getting him home is not helpful because she is focused on her

own guilt, not Veronica's. Because the others do not understand what Veronica has lost in Liam, and she cannot articulate it to them, her frustration is redirected towards them.

The litany of offenses that her mother will not be forgiven for revolve as well around Veronica's need to locate herself at the center of something, the excessive pregnancies, her mother's failure to observe and record family history, her mother's maternal unavailability, they all result in Veronica having no sense of anchor. As she fears that she will "die of unfairness" (Enright 10), or "of something - call it irrelevance" (Enright 38), she must define her motherhood against the example she feels has been insufficient to her needs. Despite Veronica's acknowledgement that her mother's failings were not entirely her fault, she lays the blame at her feet and refuses to forgive the forgetfulness of her mother. To do so would mean that her mother was not responsible for the tragedy that is Liam's death and the traumatic events that led to his suicide.

Enright's use of this novel to explore the concepts of rage and desire play to the interests of an audience that still inhabits the world her novel is set within. Ireland in the twenty-first century is increasingly influenced by European and American consumer culture, and what those cultures represent as modernity. Desire in this context is the driving force behind all of it, from what clothes to wear to what the definition of success is. As *The Gathering* retreats to the not-so-distant past to confront the failure of previous generations and their inability to develop a healthy relationship with desire, the present must renegotiate its claim to it. Veronica addresses this dysfunction, "it is not that the Hegertys don't know what they want, it is that they don't know how to want. Something about their wanting went catastrophically astray" (Enright 187). Veronica's difficulty with desire, the distortion of her ability to express her own wishes, and understand those of others, is expressed through her need for relevance. Her two measures of

success, material wealth and motherhood, are responses only to what family culture and Celtic Tiger consumerism recommend are the pinnacle of satisfaction. She is actively involved in her children's lives, but they no longer need her, and although she has the ability to buy anything, she does not want anything she can buy.

The misplaced desires of the past have been inherited by the present, but they cannot be properly assimilated because there is a gap, where, in this text, Veronica is incapable of articulating her experience as witness and victim to trauma, and her mother is incapable of protecting her from trauma because she has not yet come to terms with her own. This transmission of traumatic condition is expressed outside of the novel as Ireland tries to address its own history of domestic, and national, traumas. Enright, unlike Barry and Dean, does not offer a perspective of how to resolve the issues of memory, forgetting, and forgiveness of trauma. Perhaps it is simply enough to acknowledge the presence of such trauma, without requiring action one way or the other.

Conclusion

As these three texts demonstrate, the history of Irish identity has been influenced by a legacy of trauma. Deane, Enright, and Barry use their novels to explore aspects of contested identity in relation to trauma, and endow their characters with the heavy burden of representing an experience of trauma that is anchored to the reality of Irish history during the last century. Their construction of testimony within their respective narrative worlds supports the restoration of marginalized voices to mainstream Irish history. "Testimonies", writes LaCapra, "are significant in the attempt to understand experience and its aftermath, including memory and its lapses, in coming to terms with - or denying and repressing - the past" (*Writing History* 87).

Each of these authors creates opportunities for contemporary readers to engage with events of the past that have only just begun to be revealed. Throughout the twentieth century the dominant expression of Irish identity has excluded individuals on the margins, those whose experiences did not reflect the romanticized Catholic representation endorsed and promoted by nationalist groups.

The exploration of Ireland's past has emerged not only in literature, but in mass media. From films like *Philomena*, *The Butcher Boy*, and *The Magdalene Sisters* to poets like Eavan Boland and Elaine Feeney, the discussion of the traumatic past has permeated the social landscape. As representative texts, these novels illustrate how contemporary writers attempt to reconfigure that identity to acknowledge previously unrepresented voices. A common theme throughout is the silence that has surrounded traumatic events. As the novels discussed in this paper document, the inability to speak about traumatic experiences becomes a continuation of the trauma. These unresolved histories interrupt and influence the present in and out of the narrative worlds. Irish motherhood in particular is marked by silence, and by their inability to protect their children from the experience of trauma. The expanding body of work by Irish women, about Irish women, seeks to rectify this silence, and interrupt the cycle of trauma that has been perpetuated through it.

Despite an increased opportunity to engage with the past, Ireland still faces difficulty in resolving historical trauma, and the social conditions that have contributed to their occurrence. In Northern Ireland the movement towards reconciliation is a slow and emotionally charged process, with questions of loyalty and the identification as a victim complicates the social relationships in many communities. Like Deane's narrator, the desire to speak is countered by the necessity of maintaining a tenuous peace. The government of the Republic has acknowledged

the reality of institutional traumas, like those represented in *The Secret Scripture*, as well as widespread abuse by representatives of the Catholic church, but the damage those experiences inflicted has only begun to heal. The steps that have been taken so far are exercises in forgiveness. Ricoeur invites us to think of forgiveness in this way, “its [forgiveness] ‘poetic’ power consists in shattering the law of the irreversibility of time by changing the past, not as a record of all that has happened but in terms of its meaning for us today” (“Reflections” 7). The conversation about these traumatic experiences ensures that these events will not be forgotten, rather a promise is made to remember, and to learn how to prevent the continuation or repetition of trauma.

In terms of the representation through the arts, there is a similarly long way to go. The majority of attention to writers and artists has been focused on men (across genres and medium) who dominate the literary landscape. While female voices have emerged and demanded their place on the bookshelf and stage, they encounter persistent experiences of marginalization. From the exclusion of women writers from the *Field Day Anthology* (edited by Seamus Deane) in the early 1990s to the extremely limited representation of women playwrights in the Abbey Theatre’s “Waking the Nation” festival to commemorate the centennial of 1916, the voices of Irish women continue to be disregarded. Irish women however are no longer willing to accept this dismissal and are not only raising their voices from their marginalized position, but reclaiming the past for women who never had the opportunity to speak for themselves.

As Ireland moves into the twenty-first century and begins to negotiate a multiculturalism that has hitherto been actively repressed, the value of a diverse perspective of history will enrich a national identity that has so far struggled to provide an authentic representation of its citizens. From Ricoeur’s perspective, “recounting differently is not inimical to a certain historical

reverence to the extent that the inexhaustible richness of the event is honored by the diversity of stories which are made out of it” (“Reflections” 7). Rather than highlighting the failures of the nation to protect its people, or the perpetuation of abuse by those entrusted to power, opening the narrative of Irish history to acknowledge itself as a history of trauma demonstrates the resiliency of both an island and its people. The authors discussed in this paper each seek to explore their own perspective of an Irish identity through their novels. Representing victims of trauma restores narratives that have been repressed by those who sought to hide the shameful way that ‘sinners’, and the most vulnerable members of society, have been treated by their fellow countrymen. Despite their political agendas, these writers have taken on the burden of honoring the stories of marginalized experience, and have contributed to a discussion of the necessity of restoring the voices of those long silenced by trauma.

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